

**THE THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT OF LORDSHIP  
HOW IT MAY BE CONTRIBUTING TO THE PRESENT CRISIS IN THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)**

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**BY**

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## DEDICATION

To my wife,

Cynthia Hunt Howard,

Who models for me each day what it means to love God

And who volunteered to painstakingly reread and proof this thesis numerous times

And

To my daughter,

Anne Hunt Howard,

Who has unselfishly given of her time for a Dad to complete a thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the theological conflict regarding the Lordship of Christ that is eroding the unity of the PCUSA denomination. It will suggest a way for the denomination to rediscover its unity through the use of the sermonic method of preaching such as the one taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson in his book, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages<sup>1</sup>.

Chapter one gives background on why the differing views of the Lordship of Jesus Christ are threatening the unity of the denomination called The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Chapter two explores the meaning of the title “Lord” as it is expressed in the Scriptures with regard to Jesus Christ’s identity. The Scriptures teach the Church the proper meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord”.

Chapter three provides an overview of the theological developments on Christ’s Lordship and how the denomination’s creeds and confessions address this subject. Each creed expresses theological principles that are to guide all Reformed preaching concerning Jesus and His authority.

Chapter four will discuss how the theological conflict may be resolved. There are a number of ways in which the denomination may choose to chart a course of action. This thesis will argue that the best course is to return to an expository method of preaching that is guided by the Confessions.

Finally the fifth chapter will demonstrate the development of three expositional sermons using Robinson’s method to address the identity of Jesus as “Lord”.

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001).

## CHAPTER 1

### CAN THERE BE UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)?

Unity in diversity. Those three words are heard like a voice in the theological wilderness of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). A slogan of hope, an ideal; the call for unity is an illusive quality for a denomination in the midst of unwilled diversity. The theological quagmire of the cultural religious pluralism of today has been exacerbated by the events of the airline tragedies of September 11, 2004. A “religion of tolerance” has taken hold in the minds and hearts of the citizens of the United States as they wrestle with the question of why people, in the name of God, would fly two air buses into the Twin Towers in New York City and bring such senseless destruction upon others. This “religion of tolerance” is also influencing a change in the doctrinal declarations of the Christian Church. The teaching of the meaning of “Lord” as a title describing the person of Jesus Christ is being softened or even reinterpreted so it doesn’t offend anyone. With that theological softening, this spirit of tolerance has taken a life of its own and produced an offspring of intolerance toward any religious message or proclamation that would preach a warning of exclusion from God. These influences have escalated spiritual and emotional tensions among the clergy and laymen of the denomination and have contributed to the PCUSA’s fragmentation on issues that are directly tied to Christology and the exclusive claims of the Christian faith. With such cultural and religious tensions, is there a way in which a denomination can unite its

people in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all? What can help bring unity to the PCUSA?

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the theological conflict regarding the Lordship of Christ and how that conflict may be contributing to the eroding unity of the PCUSA denomination. The thesis will suggest a way for the denomination to rediscover its unity through the use of the sermonic method of preaching taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson in his book, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages<sup>1</sup>. It will be suggested that unity within such a diverse denomination may be obtained through the exegetical method of preaching in order to articulate and communicate the meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord”. The denomination can regain its unity only through returning to a method of preaching which expounds that confession.

The present crisis over the meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord” and how that relates to the peace, unity and purity of the denomination has reached a volatile level of schism. The reality of a deep theological division was acknowledged by the 213th General Assembly of the PCUSA (2001) when it approved the appointment of a Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity. The task force was “...directed to lead the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity, in and for the 21st century, using a process which includes conferring with synods, presbyteries, and congregations seeking the peace, unity, and purity of the Church. This discernment shall include but not be limited to issues of Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. 213th General Assembly Minutes.

Many members hope that this task force will suggest a method or means by which the PCUSA will be able to reaffirm its diversity while maintaining its unity as an organized church. Through personal experience, this writer has witnessed the tension of this crisis at a recent conference.

In the spring of 2004, a three day seminar was held at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, entitled, “Is Jesus Christ the Only Way?” The seminar was led by Dr. Douglas Otatti.<sup>3</sup> It was designed to discuss the controversy raised by The Rev. Dirk Ficca of Chicago, a featured conference speaker at the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Orange, California on August 2, 2000. The Peacemaking Conference’s theme was “Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a Diverse World.” The Rev. Mr. Ficca espoused what theologically conservative Christians would find a radical brand of ecumenism, calling into question the historic Christian assumption that Jesus is the only way to salvation.<sup>4</sup> Ficca, a Presbyterian minister, is executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions.<sup>5</sup> Ficca also directs the council’s Metropolitan Chicago Inter-religious Initiative, which promotes cooperation among religious organizations in the Chicago, Illinois area. The Council’s mission and vision statements are all inclusive statements on religious pluralism.

The mission of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its other guiding institutions in order to achieve a peaceful, just, and sustainable world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Distinguished M.E. Pemberton Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

<sup>4</sup> Dirk Ficca, “The 2000 Peacemaking Conference Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a Diverse World” <<http://www.presbyweb.com/FiccaText082600.htm>> (3 November 2004).

<sup>5</sup> A non-sectarian organization that promotes inter-religious dialogue and common action.

<sup>6</sup> Mission Statement of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions <<http://www.cpwr.org/who/who.htm>> (3 November 2004).

The vision of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is of a just, peaceful and sustainable world in which:

- The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed and restored
- Religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced with understanding and respect
- People everywhere come to know and care for their neighbors
- The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, societal and global life
- The world's most powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realize the common good
- Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world from their riches of wisdom and compassion
- All people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations.<sup>7</sup>

From his experience in this organization Ficca argued “... that there have been two basic streams in Christian thought over the last two thousand years. One I’m going to call ‘instrumental’ and one I’m going to call ‘revelatory’.”<sup>8</sup> As Ficca explained it, “the instrumental view is that salvation comes solely through Jesus. Jesus is the sole and only instrument of God’s salvation.” He goes on to clarify, “The Gospel is about Jesus; Jesus, himself, *is* the Good News. And the focus here is Christological. It is Jesus who saves us and if Jesus is the sole instrument of God—if it is only through Jesus that salvation comes—then the only way for the world to be saved is for everyone to become a Christian. So the goal of the instrumental view is Christendom—to make the whole world Christian.”<sup>9</sup>

The other view, the revelatory view “...says that salvation comes through the Spirit. And that the Good News is not the good news so much *about* Jesus, but the good news *of* Jesus: The Good News that Jesus preached. What this view says is that Jesus reveals how God has been at work in all times throughout history, in all places, in all

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



people, to bring about salvation.” Ficca suggests, “...it is God who saves us. And the goal is the kingdom of God—that people would live as God would have them live. And part of the struggle in Western Christianity for the last two thousand years has been equating Christendom with the kingdom of God.”<sup>10</sup>

In the three day seminar at Union Theological Seminary, the discussion of these two views of Rev. Ficca, revealed that there are differing views among Presbyterian clergy on what it means to be reconciled to God. The focus of the seminar was on the possibility of salvation apart from the historic understanding of a personal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Since it is held in Reformed theology that God was reconciling the world through Christ, is there any possibility of the Logos of God working outside or in addition to the earthly work of the incarnate God? As we briefly covered the confessions of the Christian Church beginning with the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed, the theme led us through a slow progression of discussion and observation of the way in which the Church has dealt with the issue of salvation.

The differences in the attendants’ viewpoints became particularly personal when this writer had an opportunity to talk with a colleague ordained as a campus chaplain. The chaplain mentioned to me that during the sessions she did not recognize anything “Christian” in what I was contributing to the discussion. The questions and comments I had raised concerning the Gospel as a message of repentance and faith struck “fear in her heart.” For her, my view restricted the redemptive work of God to the earthly ministry of Christ and excluded other ways in which God could work to accomplish redemption. Her view expressed a substantive difference in the understanding of what it means to be reconciled to God. She felt that those outside the Christian faith community who were of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

different “faith traditions” could just as easily come to a knowledge of God’s love and purpose for life. It was bordering on arrogance for me to suggest otherwise. Those of other traditions were just as sincere and human in their own search for God and therefore just as able to experience God from what they knew and learned in their own religion.

When we compared our understanding of the Scriptures and what they taught about reconciliation, our interpretations were quite different. One example of this difference was in how the Bible deals with the issue of marriage. During one session of the seminar it was suggested that as Christianity makes its way in the world and influences other cultures, one of the obvious results will be the need, as Christians, to recognize that Christianity must accommodate new forms of sexual expressions in addition to the traditional understanding of marriage in terms of one man and one woman. This writer commented on the belief that the Bible only supports marriage between a man and a woman. The chaplain responded that such interpretation was rather narrow and forced and the Scriptures could never be legitimately interpreted in such terms. By the time our discussion had ended we both walked away with great reservations as to whether the other was even doing the work of God. There was an uneasiness and estrangement from our brief discussion.

One reflection on the conversation loomed large. We were both ordained as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments. We each had gone through an examining process for ordination by the PCUSA. That process includes:

- 1) assessing the ability to find and state the meaning of an assigned passage of Scripture, demonstrating working knowledge of the original language of the text and ability to understand its historical situation,

- 2) assessing the knowledge of the form and content of the Bible.
- 3) assessing the capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the Church in relating the gospel to the faith of the Church in the contemporary world,
- 4) assessing the understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, as well as a familiarity with the Directory of Worship and the Book of Confessions and their application to the life of worshipping communities, and finally,
- 5) assessing the working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the PCUSA and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the Church are determined.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this ordination process we had distinctly divergent views of Christology, the authority of Scripture, and ecclesiology as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Today the denomination is polarized by such different views and those views are represented by groups which say they are seeking to reform the church. These two groups, The Presbyterian Coalition and The Covenant Network of Presbyterians, selected titles to represent not one individual or a presbytery but a group of ministers and elders who agree with their view of Christ and His Church and that their vision will work to further the work and ministry of the denomination. Though both groups declare they are seeking to “revitalize” and “reclaim” unity in the church’s purpose, they are at odds on the issues of the Lordship of Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order 2004/2005, (Published by the Office of the General Assembly, Louisville, Kentucky), G-14.0311d (1-5).

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians claims a broad-based, national group of clergy and lay leaders working for a church that is simultaneously faithful, just, and whole. They seek to support the mission and unity of the PCUSA in a time of potentially divisive controversy. They claim to articulate and act on the church's historic progressive vision and to work for a fully inclusive church. The Covenant Network is committed to finding a way both to live out the gracious hospitable gospel we have received and to live together with all fellow members in the PCUSA. Formed in 1997 by a group who define inclusive to mean the support of ordaining individuals who are self-professing practicing homosexuals<sup>12</sup>, The Covenant Network believed that amendment would give sessions and presbyteries more discretion in discerning God's call for ordained office on particular people, within clear biblical and confessional standards. Its Board of Directors and Board of Advisors include distinguished pastors and theologians from all parts of the country, united in their determination to keep the church from either enshrining a narrow orthodoxy or splitting over non-essential matters. They claim an appeal to the "broad middle" of the church and have attracted support from across the denomination. Though Amendment (97)-A was not affirmed by a majority of presbyteries in the winter and spring of 1998, the Covenant Network recognized that the issues raised by that debate are representative of wider challenges facing the denomination as it seeks to be faithful in a time of controversy and change.

The Presbyterian Coalition is also a broad-based, national group of clergy, lay leaders and renewal organizations, many of which have already been at work to renew the PCUSA. This coalition sees itself as a movement of Presbyterians committed to life

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<sup>12</sup> Amendment (97)-A to the Book of Order, the "Fidelity and Integrity" amendment sought to allow ordination of individuals who are openly homosexual.

and transformation in the PCUSA by exalting Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, energizing its congregations and upholding historic biblical leadership standards by coordinating with all individuals and groups who share the convictions expressed in the declaration, “Union in Christ” and who are working for a revitalized church. They reaffirm their commitment to renewal through the existing structures of the PCUSA and seek to encourage all individuals, groups and governing bodies who share their convictions, to act creatively and passionately to identify and implement strategies for renewal.<sup>13</sup>

Though both of these groups share in common a desire to call for unity and reformation of the PCUSA denomination they issue this call from two opposing perspectives of what unity is and what kind of reformation should occur.

In their confession, A Call To Covenant Community,<sup>14</sup> the Covenant Network affirms “...faith in Jesus Christ who proclaimed the reign of God by preaching good news to the poor, binding up the broken-hearted and calling all to repent and believe the good news. It is Christ whose life and ministry form and discipline all we say and do.”<sup>15</sup> They envision a church reformation “...built upon the hospitality of Jesus, who said, ‘Whoever comes to me I will not cast out.’”<sup>16</sup> They proclaim the good news of the gospel is “...that all—those who are near and those who were far off—are invited; all are members of the household and citizens of the realm of God. No one has a claim on this invitation and none of us becomes worthy, even by sincere effort to live according to God’s will.

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<sup>13</sup> The Presbyterian Coalition, “Mission Statement” <<http://www.presbycoalition.org/MissionStatement.html>> (2 October 2004).

<sup>14</sup> The Covenant Network, “A Call to Covenant Community” <<http://www.covenantnetwork.org/calI2cc.html>> (2 October 2004 ).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Grateful for our own inclusion, we carry out the mission of the church to extend God's hospitality to a broken and fearful and lonely world."<sup>17</sup> The Network also claims "...that the place of the church is in the world and for the world: living the good news, proclaiming grace, working with others for justice, freedom and peace."<sup>18</sup> Therefore Christian faith has "...an inevitable public and political dimension."<sup>19</sup> Concerning God's work in the world they believe that "...God is at work in culture and community beyond the church, the church need not be afraid to look and listen for God's voice from outside its own sphere."<sup>20</sup> The view of the Lordship of Christ is one where God is not only working "in Jesus" through His incarnation but also beyond the Church through the Holy Spirit reconciling humanity back to God. Jesus as the logos of God is Lord of all. This view is all inclusive of all individuals and is not limited to individuals just within the Christian Church. The Network proclaims "...that God is at work here and now to create not just individual Christian believers and the church but a whole new humanity in a whole new heaven and earth."<sup>21</sup>

In distinction from the Network, The Presbyterian Coalition declares its understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ as "...the gracious mission of God to the world and for the world. Jesus is Emmanuel and Saviour. One with the Father, God incarnate as Mary's son, Lord of all, the truly human one. His coming transforms everything. His Lordship casts down every idolatrous claim to authority. His incarnation discloses the only path to God. His life shows what it means to be human. His atoning

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The Covenant Network, "Evangelism in a Pluralistic Society: A Reformed Perspective" <<http://www.covenantnetwork.org/sermon&papers/guthrie.html>> (5 October 2004).

death reveals the depth of God's love for sinners His bodily resurrection shatters the powers of sin and death."<sup>22</sup> Jesus as the logos of God is Lord of all but He is the only path to God.

With such theological diversity, three questions need to be addressed. Can there be "unity" in such diverse views and if so by what means? What is it that unites believers as a church? When Christ is proclaimed as "Lord" by the PCUSA what is it that is being preached?

As a Reformed body, Presbyterians believe that unity is maintained and strengthened through a clarification of the confession "Jesus is Lord." It will be suggested in this thesis that a foundational unity can be rediscovered for the PCUSA through a method of preaching. This exegetical method of preaching can articulate and communicate the meaning of the confession "Jesus is Lord" and through such preaching the denomination can regain its unity through the truth of that confession.

The second chapter will explore the meaning of title "Lord" as it is expressed in the Scriptures dealing with the identity of Jesus Christ. In what way are the Scriptures to be interpreted and understood in the Reformed Tradition? From that tradition, does the interpretation of Scripture clearly reveal how Jesus is understood to be "Lord"? What did the New Testament Church teach concerning the work of Jesus of Nazareth and how is Jesus' authority exercised not only on earth but in heaven?

The third chapter will deal with an overview of the theological developments and thoughts on the issue of Christ's Lordship. The chapter will explore the denomination's creeds and confessions to address the Christian confession and proclamation that "Jesus

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<sup>22</sup> The Presbyterian Coalition, "Union In Christ: A Declaration" <<http://www.presbycoalition.org/union.htm>> (6 October 2004).

is Lord”. How does that confession inform the denomination’s understanding of the authority of Jesus Christ? The PCUSA has in its constitution eleven (11) creeds and confessions that cover three areas of Church history: 1) the “early creeds”, 2) the confessions from the period of the reformation and 3) what are termed “modern creeds.” What do each of these creeds express as a part of the Reformed Tradition’s preaching about Jesus and His authority.

The fourth chapter will discuss how the theological conflict on the understanding of Lordship threatens the unity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and how it contributes to the disharmony and disunity within the denomination. This thesis will also suggest the possible courses this conflict may take in order to be resolved. There are a number of ways in which the denomination may choose to chart a course of action. Most of them are radical in either direction and few of those that are proposed have a majority following.

Finally the fifth chapter will develop three expositional sermons addressing the idea of Jesus as “Lord” and will include information discovered through this research. Each sermon will be developed from a passage of Scripture reflecting the early church’s view of Jesus as Lord. The first sermon will deal with the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ where He is quoted saying, “*I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.*”<sup>23</sup> The second sermon will deal with the identity of Jesus as He reveals Himself to His disciples by asking “*Who do you say I am?*”<sup>24</sup> The third sermon will deal with how the early apostolic teaching explained the substantive purpose of God in the incarnation to the community of faith found in “*He is the image of the*

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<sup>23</sup> John 14:6 (NIV).

<sup>24</sup> Luke 9:20 (NIV).



*invisible God...*<sup>25</sup> By developing these messages the writer wishes to show how an exegetical approach to preaching may help the PCUSA and in particular the congregation of a local church to focus more clearly on what the denomination believes and proclaims in its teaching of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

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<sup>25</sup> Colossians 1:15 (NIV).

## CHAPTER 2

### HOW THE EARLY CHURCH UNDERSTOOD THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, AS REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURES

This chapter will explore the identity of Jesus Christ and the meaning of the title “Lord” as it is expressed in the Scriptures. Of particular importance to this thesis is what authority the Scriptures have in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and in what way Presbyterians are to interpret the Scriptures. The subject of scriptural authority and interpretation will be covered in Chapter 4. There we will deal with the conflict present within the denomination and the possible solutions to the crisis. The assumption behind this research is that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are the Word of God, written as a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is assumed that the scriptural teaching on Christian faith has been held among believers since the beginning of the Church as a rule of faith.

Researching the title “Lord”, as used in the Scriptures, entails an enormous study of Christology. It is the writer’s intention to narrow this thesis to the one specific area of Christology that examines the use of the title “Lord” as the Scriptures record how the early church understood and preached the identity of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is evident from the teaching of the Scriptures that the early church’s earliest confession was “Jesus is Lord”.

In the New Testament, the word “lord” is translated from the Greek word “κύριος”. “Κύριος” originally was used as an adjective with the sense of “having power”, but serves only as a noun in the New Testament and occurs in every New Testament book except Titus and 1,2, and 3 John. Its common meaning is “sir,” “owner,” “master,” “lord,” or “Lord,” being used of a man as an owner (Matthew 20:8), master (Luke 13:8), father (Matthew. 21:30), or one worthy of respect (“Sir,” John 4:11); of an angel (Acts 10:4); of Jesus, both during His ministry (Luke 9:54) and after His resurrection (Ephesians 6:5-10); and of God (Luke 1:6; Acts 7:33; James 1:7).<sup>26</sup>

David Wells points out three considerations in researching this title. As indicated above, the term “lord” is used in different ways throughout the New Testament. Secondly, there is some question as to the related meaning of the use of “κύριος” in the New Testament and the political or social use of the Greek word in the context of that time.<sup>27</sup> Finally, there is debate over the translation of certain Hebrew and Aramaic terms and how they equate in meaning in Greek. The writer will examine these considerations in order.

Since “κύριος” is a Greek word, it carries meaning from the context of the Hellenistic culture during the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Some scholars have suggested that the term must be solely understood from that cultural context. There were two uses in that cultural setting—one profane and the other religious. Oscar Cullmann suggests that “κύριος” was used in both ways in connection with certain religious concepts and in a general sense of “master” or “owner”. The later use was a term of

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<sup>26</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume III, ed. Kittel, Derhard, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley,, D. Litt., D.D., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 1041 ff.

<sup>27</sup> David F. Wells, The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation, (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), 74-75.

politeness in addressing someone. He also points out that the two connotations began to be merged together in addressing a person of authority. This is not considered unusual since a similar merger of the religious and profane use can be traced in the religions of Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria when calling upon the gods and goddesses.

The same development of a merger of the religious and profane can be traced in the title “lord” as it was used in Roman emperor worship. Though the term primarily had a political-legal sense, it also refers to the emperor’s divinity since he was considered to be directly descended from a god.<sup>28</sup> Caesars of Rome were worshipped as lords because of the belief that they were descended from the gods or in some way had divine origin. Such emperor worship was a political and social force that helped to unite the vast Roman Empire. As time passed, it became impossible to make a sharp distinction between the acknowledgement of political subjection to the emperor and worshipful subordination to him as a god.

This political and social development became a challenge to the monotheistic faiths of Christians and Jews of the Roman Empire who would be expected to worship Caesar as Lord. Emperor worship directly challenged a Christian’s allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. Evidence of this cultural conflict can be found from the New Testament where Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:5 proclaims, “...there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is only one God...and one Lord, Jesus Christ.” As we shall see, for Christians who believed that all authority was given to Jesus Christ, the “gods” and “lords” were no longer absolute in their authority but had been conquered by Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Because of the cultural norm of addressing men of power such as governors,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 200 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, (London: SCM Press LTD, 1959), 196.

teachers or Rabbis as “lord” there are many instances where Jesus was addressed as “lord” in polite address. Those instances in the Scriptures may reflect the influence of Hellenistic culture but it is impossible from the context to assign every title of “lord” used in the New Testament solely to this category.

Jesus’ authority was far greater than mere political-social authority or lordship of Hellenistic influence. Therefore, there is no need to consider the vocative use of “κύριος” since that would possibly fit in the political-social category of meaning. There are numerous instances where it is used as a polite address recognizing Jesus’ leadership and teaching (e.g. Matthew 8:8, 21; 15:27; 17:15; 18:21). These passages do not necessarily confer on Jesus any divine status but simply the honor rabbis of the day received.<sup>30</sup> It is the other Christian use of “lord” that the writer will focus on in order to better understand the early Church’s meaning in the confession, “Jesus is Lord”.

Debate over the translation of certain Hebrew and Aramaic terms has a great bearing on the meaning of “Lord” as it is applied to God. There has been debate among scholars over whether “κύριος” is used for God’s holy name, Yahweh, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. That debate seems to this writer to be moot because of the overwhelming instances of such use. In the Septuagint there are over 6,000 cases where “κύριος” is linguistically substituted for YHWH, the divine name of God.<sup>31</sup> In the Old Testament “*adonay*” (“Lord”) was customarily substituted for Yahweh, out of reverential avoidance of the name of the God of Israel. This explains:

- (1) why Greek-speaking Jews in the 1st century A.D. (and probably before) regularly used “Κύριος” (“Lord”), the Greek equivalent of “*adonay*”, to refer to God; and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Wells, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 75.

- (2) why the Masoretes in the 7th century A.D. vocalized the consonants YHWH with the vowels of “*adonay*” (which in turn produced the hybrid English form “Jehovah”);
- (3) why English Bibles commonly use “LORD” for Yahweh and Latin versions use Dominus. (Where the Hebrew is “*adonay*” Yahweh [e.g., Gen. 15:2, 8], the AV, RSV, and NEB have “Lord God” [the ASV has “Lord Jehovah”] to avoid the repetition of “Lord.”).<sup>32</sup>

For the early church the term “Lord” was used in reference to God. It is in the use of this term “Lord” for Jesus Christ as well as for God, Yahweh, which naturally led to a doctrinal identity between them.<sup>33</sup>

An early Aramaic equivalent for lord, “*mar*”, is important for two reasons. Jesus as well as his disciples spoke Aramaic. Secondly, the New Testament has preserved the Aramaic liturgical prayer “*maranatha*” of the early Church.<sup>34</sup> This is thought to be the earliest expression of Jesus’ identity from the Scriptures.

In the context of the belief in a risen Lord who by that resurrection displayed God’s exaltation, it is not unreasonable to maintain that the early Church equated the same meaning to the Hebrew word “*adonay*”, the Greek word “κύριος”, and the Aramaic word “*mar*”. The very least that can be said is that “*mar*” was commonly known as a very respectful term. It expressed greater respect than “Rabbi” and was used to refer to

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<sup>32</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 3, ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., , 1986), 157-158.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Wells, 76.

<sup>34</sup> Leopold Sabourin, S.J., The Names and Titles of Jesus; Themes of Biblical Theology, trans. Maurice Carroll, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), 254.

kings and emperors as well as highly respected teachers.<sup>35</sup> Its use in the New Testament is most likely a reference to Jesus as Lord of Lords.

Since this thesis is focusing on the preaching of the title “Lord”, a logical place to begin examining that title is in the context of its use in the Holy Scriptures in the first sermon recorded in the New Testament. Peter’s sermon on Pentecost is primarily important because it specifically reveals what message the early church received through inspiration of the Holy Spirit and what they preached as to the significance of Jesus Christ following the resurrection. Robinson’s first three steps in his ten stages of developing and delivering an expository message is a helpful guide in determining the limits of a passage according to a unit of thought. By establishing that unit it is easier to study the passage in its context and with the help of study aids to discovering the central idea of the sermon and what Peter was teaching concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The third step is taking what has been learned in the study of the unit and determining the exegetical idea and its development.

In Acts 2, the Scriptures record what is commonly known as the Pentecost Sermon by the Apostle Peter shortly after the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The background and occasion of the sermon is given in Acts 2:1-13. The Scriptures record that the disciples obeyed the Lord and returned to Jerusalem to await the promised gift of a helper who would lead them in testifying about the risen Lord. After the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they began to prophesy and speak in other tongues. Many Jews in Jerusalem thought the disciples were drunk. In this setting Peter begins preaching.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Cullmann, 202.

The unit of thought is marked by the transitional word “then” in Acts 2:14 and is carried until verse 41. The exegetical idea is discovered by asking two questions. The first question, “What is the author saying?” guides the expositor in discovering the subject of the passage. This subject should be expressed in a complete sentence and stated in the form of a question. Phrasing the subject as a question guides the expositor to determine the complement to the subject. The second question, “What is the author saying about what he is saying?” guides the expositor in determining the complement. The complement should support and develop the subject in expressing the idea of the author. The exegetical idea is a product of combining the subject and the complement into a complete sentence or as Robinson would call it, the big idea.

Peter’s sermon idea is expressed in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord (κύριος) and Christ.”<sup>36</sup> To support his claim Peter develops his sermon around this big idea. Using language skills the expositor can then determine what Peter means in referring to Jesus being Lord and Christ. Was the sermon pointing to Jesus as a political-social lord? Was it proclaiming Jesus with the human authority of the Greek world? Or was it proclaiming something far greater?

Peter first proclaims that the believers are not drunk but what has happened in the giving of the Holy Spirit, demonstrated in the preaching in differing tongues, is a sign from the living God. He preaches to a Jewish audience that Jesus of Nazareth was accredited to them by God as evidenced by the miracles and signs which he performed. Because of their unbelief, Jesus was handed over to be crucified as part of God’s plan and God raised him from the

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<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:36 (NIV).



dead. Jesus is made Lord not by Peter's preaching, but by God who raised Jesus from the dead. The event of the resurrection is the confirmation of those two titles, Lord and Messiah, now to be applied to Jesus of Nazareth.

In the context of a Hellenistic culture, it needs to be acknowledged that other cultural influences were present, namely Peter was preaching to a Jewish crowd who had gathered from the regions of the Roman Empire to be in Jerusalem to worship Yahweh on the high and holy festival of Passover. His audience was Jewish. Peter, therefore, builds his message based on the beliefs that are common among the Jews.

He begins to support his idea by reminding the Jews about King David. David, known of by all Jews, was considered to have authored Psalm 110, referenced by Peter in Acts 2:34b, and was anointed King by God and given the promise of an eternal dynasty through his descendants. What David spoke of in the Psalm would refer either to him or his descendant, the Messiah or Christ.<sup>37</sup> By designating Jesus as Messiah, Peter is preaching of God's completed work of faithfulness in keeping God's covenant in the past. The coming of the Messiah was based on the hope that one day Yahweh would come to bring the end of the world or usher in an important turning point in human history. God would inaugurate a new era.<sup>38</sup>

Peter preaches that Jesus is the fulfilment of those covenant promises. He reminded the Jews of the Davidic promise of God that one would come after King David who would sit on his throne. King David, under prophetic influence,

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<sup>37</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina Series Volume 5, The Acts of the Apostles* ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Sabourin, 19.

prophesied about the resurrection of Christ and that God would raise the promised Messiah, the very resurrection event that Peter claimed to witness. He goes on to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is not only the promised Messiah but that Jesus has been given authority as Lord (“...exalted to the right hand of God”<sup>39</sup>), the ultimate authority of God.

For Jews there is only one God and that God, alone, is Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4, Zechariah 14:9). By preaching that “Jesus is Lord”, Peter proclaims Jesus has been given an authority equal to God. “Jesus occupies the position of supreme authority in the universe, right next to the throne of God himself!”<sup>40</sup> To the Jews who were listening, this message is unmistakable, the man Jesus is God. Winn says, “In this position of authority, he has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. And it is Jesus who...is pouring out the Spirit on his Church.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, this Pentecostal sermon is a Trinitarian message that not only reveals that Jesus is God but that God has revealed Himself as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the three are one.

Barrett suggests that the text implies Jesus was not given the title of Christ before the resurrection; “...there was once a time when the crucified Jesus was not “Κύριος” and “Χριστός”, and that questions when he was appointed to these positions, and exactly what positions the terms denote.”<sup>42</sup> Was the man Jesus Lord and Christ before the resurrection or after? His reason for understanding why some would question the definition of the terms is found in the context of verse 34. “For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he

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<sup>39</sup> Acts 2:33 (NIV).

<sup>40</sup> Albert C. Winn, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 20, ed. Balmer H. Kelly, John Knox Press, Fifth Printing 1970), 35-36.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I-XIV, Volume 1, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 151-152.

said, “The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand.” (Acts 2:34 NIV) Barrett points out the first term YHWH is the Hebrew name for God and translated into English as “Lord”. The second translation of lord “*adonay*” is a Hebrew title of another person whom God invites to sit at God’s right hand. Barrett points out that the use of two different words, translated as “Lord”, are two different subjects. The subject of the first term is obviously speaking of God since it is the divine name of God—YHWH. It is the second use of “*adonay*” (lord) that is under question. From the context of the passage that person is greater than David but is distinguished from the God of the Old Testament. Barrett does affirm that the context makes it clear that the one “...who shares the throne shares also in deity...” and “...he who is God is what he is from and to eternity—otherwise he is not God.”<sup>43</sup> Since the subject of Peter’s message is the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is it not Jesus, being raised from the dead, also being invited to sit at God’s right hand? The answer is yes, but he questions whether any developed Christology is present. He concludes that this is an unreflecting Christology and must later be expounded by the Apostle Paul. The identity of Jesus as Lord is not thought through in Peter’s message. The New Testament will later reveal more of the identity of Jesus as Lord. A Palestinian Jew (Peter) and his Jewish audience (made up of Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews) would naturally recognize the authority associated with the term “*adonay*”. “*Adonay*” was used out of respect for Yahweh. It is now used by Peter in the context of preaching about the man Jesus. Peter proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth has equal authority with Yahweh of the Old Testament and this is demonstrated through the event of the resurrection. Here in Peter’s sermon the early church’s preaching identifies God and Jesus as one.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Barrett, 152.

Wells sees it as beyond dispute that an early linguistic bridge was built between Christ as “Κύριος” and Yahweh, and this bridge led naturally to a doctrinal identity between Jesus and Yahweh.<sup>44</sup> Peter’s use of the Old Testament in his sermon, particularly the Psalms, as a method used to identify Jesus as Lord is the same method other New Testament authors followed. What was said of Yahweh from the Old Testament can be said in many instances of Christ in the New Testament. When the Old Testament reveals that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess God, such as in Isaiah 45:23, the prophet is speaking of Yahweh, and the early church applied it to Jesus (Philippians 2:10, 11). In Hebrews, the words celebrating Yahweh as creator in Psalm 102:25-27, apply equally to Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12. There are other instances in the New Testament that continue to give this dual identity. What was said of Yahweh in the Old Testament is said of Christ in the New Testament. God’s gospel is also Jesus Christ’s gospel. The Kingdom belongs to God as well as to Jesus Christ. To have faith is to believe upon God or upon Christ or upon both. God and Christ were alike to be praised, thanked and worshipped (John 14:9).

Barrett is partially correct in pointing out the Apostle Paul’s contribution to the development of the theological foundation of Lordship, but it is a foundation that Paul received from the early church, explained and passed on to other believers.<sup>45</sup> Since Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles it would not be surprising that his preaching would develop for Gentiles, as well as for the Jews, the meaning of the confession, “Jesus is Lord”. The Gentiles would be hearing the preaching of “Jesus Christ is Lord” not from a Jewish perspective of the Old Testament but from their own pagan worldview. It also is true that

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Wells, 76.

<sup>45</sup> See Cullmann, 216 and Wells, 77.

the Jews would immediately associate the title given to Jesus with the one true God, therefore, ascribing divinity to Jesus as well.

“The Lordship of Christ was placed in an eternal perspective. As Lord, Christ was pre-existent and the Creator of all things (John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2, 3) and as Lord he will yield up to his Father a redeemed cosmos (1 Corinthians 15:23-28) and institute the new creation. And everywhere the conviction is expressed that because he is the Sovereign Lord, all enemies who oppose God’s will, truth, and reign will be conquered (Acts 2:34, 35; 5:31; 7:55; Romans. 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 1:20; 1Peter 3:22; Revelation 3:21).”<sup>46</sup>

Acts 2:36 then is the first recorded proclamation of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Jesus was fully man and at the same time God incarnate. Jesus is the one sending the Holy Spirit to those who believe upon him that they might be his witnesses. It is a message that God, in raising Jesus from the dead, has given to him all authority in heaven and earth. This authority though proclaimed after the resurrection is evident from the Gospels in Jesus’ display of power to forgive sin (Matthew 9:2, 5; Mark 2:5, 9; Luke 5:20, 23; 7:48) his claim to be Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5), his power over creation (Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24) his authority over every principality and power (Matthew 9:33; 11:18; 17:18; Mark 7:26, 29; Luke 4:33, 35; 7:33; 8:29; 9:42; 11:14; John 8:49; 10:21) and his power to heal with a word and/or a touch (Matthew 8:8; 9:21; Mark 5:23, 28; Luke 5:15; 6:18; 7:7; 8:50; 13:14).

The Jews’ response to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 was indicative of a submissive response to the confession “Jesus is Lord”. Convinced that they were guilty of having the Messiah of God executed, the Jews cry out to know how they could now be saved. They

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Wells, 76.

had crucified the King who was the very hope and promise of their future as God's people. Peter's answer to them was a command that they turn away from their former judgment of who Jesus of Nazareth and acknowledge Jesus as both Lord and Christ. By repenting of their former thinking about Jesus and being willing to receive baptism in the name and authority of Jesus Christ they could then find salvation. This act of baptism is an outward sign and seal of such repentance and a turning to God by faith. Such a response was an action of yielding to the confession "Jesus is Lord and God". God was in Jesus and Jesus was in God, therefore, Jesus has been given all authority and power in heaven and on earth.

There are three passages where the phrase "Jesus [Christ] is Lord" is used to further reveal the meaning and scope of this title. Since the New Testament is repetitive of certain themes of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, these three passages will be examined as a summary of the early church's understanding of the meaning of "Lord" and how it is referenced in the rest of the New Testament.

In Romans 10:9 Paul writes, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The context of this teaching Paul was giving to the Roman Christians deals with how one is made righteous before God. The Jews believed they were righteous in keeping the law of God. It was their work in obedience to the law of God that justified them. Believing his fellow Jews to be deceived, Paul earnestly desires and prays for the Israelites to be saved from this delusion. As it stands, some of them are not. The Jews had a zeal for God's law but it is not based on faith leading to salvation. Christ is the end of the law and the law properly understood points or directs a person to Jesus Christ so that one may

find righteousness by faith in God and not by their self-righteous acts. Therefore, faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the atonement of sin is the means by which salvation is made possible.

To further illustrate this point Paul reminds the Romans that Moses spoke about this same truth by referring to Leviticus 18:5. At first this seems to be a contradiction of Paul's argument. Moses is commanded by God to tell the people that they are no longer to live as they did when they were slaves in Egypt or live the way the Canaanites do in the land where God was leading them to live. Moses is to tell the people that they are to obey God's laws and follow God's decrees. The one who keeps the law and decrees will live by them. Since the Egyptians and Canaanites did not live by the law of God, the Jews are warned not to follow their example. Paul then quotes from Deuteronomy 30:14 to support that conclusion. The Egyptians and Canaanites did not live by the law of God because they did not live by faith. God says to the Israelites that what God is commanding them to do is not too difficult or beyond them. Keeping the law perfectly is impossible. They don't have to do the impossible because the word of God is near them and faith in God's Word is what is possible. "For Paul the word is not a series of commandments, but the word of faith."<sup>47</sup> "Paul is implying that faith is the expected human response to the preached word, the gospel he proclaims. That word stirs up faith in those whom it accosts and challenges. It is to be found on the lips and in the heart, i.e., close to one who would believe."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 384.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Romans, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Anchor Bible*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 591-592.

It was never through the keeping of the law that one was made righteous but only through faith in the work of God who raised Jesus from the dead. It is through faith in that event that righteousness is achieved. Paul proclaims that such faith is evident in two qualities that are dependent on one another, what is said with the tongue and what is believed in the heart, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>49</sup> “One must utter the basic Christian confession of faith and mean it.”<sup>50</sup> It is the decisive and distinctive belief of Christianity.<sup>51</sup> It is through faith in this great sacrifice of Jesus that sin is atoned and individuals are restored to a right relationship with God, not through the keeping of the law. It is faith in God that brings the where-with-all for the believer to observe the decrees and commandments.

The acclamation of “Jesus as Lord” is a very early and a central element of Christian confession, as is the conviction that God raised Jesus from the dead. As Moo states, “Paul’s focus here on Christ’s resurrection is not, of course, intended to detract from his death or from other aspects of his work; as Calvin explains, the resurrection alone is ‘often set before us as the assurance of our salvation, not to draw away our attention from this death, but because of it bears witness to the efficacy and fruit of his death.’ The gospel, then, is ‘near’ to us because it requires only what our own hearts and mouths can do; and when we respond, it brings near to us God’s salvation.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Romans 10:9 (NIV).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Fitzmyer, 592.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 530.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. N.B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce and G.D. Fee, (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 658.



Therefore salvation is made possible through God's work of the cross and is assured through the authority given to Jesus Christ by being raised from the dead. To proclaim with your mouth that Jesus is Lord is to confess that Jesus shares the name and the nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God<sup>53</sup> and by faith one yields to Jesus Christ in all things. The resurrection and the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is the work of God done once-for-all.

It is important to note that to be yielded by faith to the Lordship of Christ is to believe in the resurrection. That confession included the belief that Jesus, true man and true God, was crucified, dead and was buried and on the third day rose again. If one proclaims that Jesus is Lord but then denies the resurrection she or he has also denied Jesus as Lord. To be saved is to confess and believe that God was incarnate in Jesus and God raised this Jesus from the dead, thereby, making him both Lord and Christ. A question might be asked, "Isn't the confession a "work" of the believer? Can't anyone say the words "Jesus is Lord"? The answer is obviously, "Yes". Any person can mouth the words, but is it faith that is exercised for reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins or mere words spoken? Personal faith is actively receiving the gift of eternal life in the work of God through the historical event of the resurrection. Morris points out, "What Paul is saying is that to know that Jesus is Lord is not a human discovery; it is something revealed by the Holy Spirit."<sup>54</sup> Therefore to confess Jesus as Lord is to receive by faith the work of the cross and to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in such a way as to undergo a change of affection and behavior. It is to

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<sup>53</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Letter to the Romans*, Volume 2, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Commentary on Romans IX-XVI*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 529.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Morris, 385.

acknowledge that God is truth. It is a confession of turning away from an affectionate behavior for sin and rebellion against God and a turning in submission to Jesus as God. Since Jesus is God, the supreme authority, he continues to declare what sin is and is the deliverer from its power so that those who come by faith are free to follow God. To examine more closely this change of affection and behavior brought on by the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we will turn to the First Letter to the Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul writes, “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (NIV) The context of this passage is an address to the Christians of Corinth concerning some confusion they have over spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Paul writes out of concern that they are lacking knowledge on what influence the Holy Spirit has upon a believer. Paul scorns the idols the Corinthians used to worship as mute because they cannot hear and answer prayer nor speak, in contrast to the Spirit of God who can. He also reminds them that in some of the religious worship they used to be a part of they would see people claim “inspired utterances” in some form during worship, despite the muteness of the idols.<sup>55</sup> The problem addressed is not clear from the context except that the Christians are being wrongly influenced in their worship of God by their former way of life. Paul writes to help them understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. It is at this point that interpretation becomes difficult. The difficulty is in the first clause “Jesus is accursed!”<sup>56</sup> Fee suggests that this is possibly

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<sup>55</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N.B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce and G D. Fee, (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 578.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

a hypothetical situation Paul is addressing to serve as an analogy to their pagan past or else it is something that some of them had actually experienced in their pagan past. In either case, Paul is writing to remind them that “inspired utterance” is not evidence of being “led of the Spirit.”<sup>57</sup>

Some find the other clause just as troubling to interpret since it is physically possible for anyone to mouth the words “Jesus is Lord”. Though this is true, to say “Jesus is Lord” as a confession meant absolute allegiance to Jesus as one’s deity and set believers apart from both Jews, who considered such a confession to be blasphemy, and pagans who worshipped idols in various cults. To make such a confession would open a person to various kinds of persecution. Paul’s point is that just as the Corinthian Christians were formerly led by mute idols now that Jesus is their Lord they are led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables them not only to say the words “Jesus is Lord” but to have the faith to believe that God has given Jesus all authority and power over heaven and earth and that God raised him from the dead. The confession was evidenced by a changed life lived in the reality of a living Savior. To make such a confession and then to live out that confession in a city like Corinth was impossible unless faith was evident and active in the believer. To say “Jesus is Lord” is to be marked by a life open to the leading of God’s Spirit to do God’s will.

The final passage we will examine is Philippians 2:9-11; “9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 581.

<sup>58</sup> Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV).

Paul wrote a letter filled with a tone of joy for the Philippians' faith in Jesus Christ and their partnership in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup> He encourages them to continue to live a life worthy of that Gospel even though there may be suffering or hardship for them individually or collectively.<sup>60</sup> He then encourages them to imitate Christ's humility out of gratitude for the grace of God which they have received, by working to be united in their ministry. That unity should be marked by a self-sacrificial spirit that looks out for others.<sup>61</sup> Paul writes,

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>62</sup>

It is at this point that Paul pens what Fee says "...is the closest thing to Christology that one finds in Paul; and here we see again why the 'scandal of the cross' was so central to his understanding of everything Christian."<sup>63</sup>

Historically, the interpretation of this passage hinges on four difficult words:

- "*morphe*" ("in the very nature God", NIV),
- "*harpagmon*" ("something to be grasped", NIV),
- "*ekenosen*" ("he made himself nothing", NIV) and
- "*homoiomati*" ("in human likeness", NIV).

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<sup>59</sup> Philippians 1:3-11 (NIV).

<sup>60</sup> Philippians 1:11-30 (NIV).

<sup>61</sup> Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV).

<sup>62</sup> Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV).

<sup>63</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995 ), 197.

Many scholars assume from the influential work of Lohmeyer that Philippians 2:5-11 is a hymn.<sup>64</sup> Fee seems to doubt anyone could miss the poetic and exalted nature of the passage<sup>65</sup> and finds the narrative character of the text to be descriptive of Christ's pre-existence (vs. 6), followed by his incarnation (vs.7), including his death on the cross (vs.8), and concludes with his (assumed) return to heaven as the exalted Lord of heaven and earth (vs. 9-11).<sup>66</sup>

Paul explains how Christ is to be an example for the Philippians in how they can find unity serving each other in the way Jesus Christ served them. They were to have the same disposition or habitual attitude individually and collectively.<sup>67</sup> Verse 5 could be interpreted as either the Philippians are to imitate Christ or to be what they already are in him (or both!).<sup>68</sup> Paul shows Jesus Christ's disposition by revealing his pre-existence as God before the incarnation (vs. 6), "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...."

In verses 5 and 6, the meaning of the first two terms has been debated. "*Morphe*" is a Greek word that is only used twice in the New Testament, here and in Mark 16:12. It is a difficult word and is translated as *form, external appearance*. Generally it is a form or an external appearance that can be discerned through the natural senses (Mark 16.12). Here in Philippians it means "*of the nature of something*" and is used of Christ's contrasting modes of being in his preexistent states (*form, nature*) and human states

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<sup>64</sup> R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, (Cambridge at the University Press, 1967), 24-41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Fee, 192-3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>67</sup> Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Sacra Pagina Series Volume 10, Philippians and Philemon*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2005), 80.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

(*form, nature*) (Phil 2:6, 7).<sup>69</sup> Collange writes, “...any interpretation of the first occurrence of “*morphe*” which will not apply to the second (vs. 7b) must be rejected. This then excludes what is called the Adamic interpretation some scholars have proposed. Any reference to Adam is clearly “...alien to the purport of the hymn.”<sup>70</sup> Jesus was not just a man as a second Adam figure coming to restore what was lost as some have tried to suggest. By using the term “*morphe*”, Paul “...characterizes both the reality (his being God) and the metaphor (his taking on the role of a slave), since it denotes ‘form’ or ‘shape’ not in terms of the external features by which something is recognized, but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Hence it means *that which truly characterizes a given reality*.”<sup>71</sup> The early church believed that Jesus, known to them as truly human, was preexistent in the “form” of God. He was characterized by what was essential to being God. Paul’s point in this passage is that Jesus as God chose to be a servant. But in what way did Christ retain his deity?

The second term Paul uses, “*harpagmon*”, means “the act of seizing” or “robbery”.<sup>72</sup> “Not with ‘*harpagmon*’ did Christ consider to be equal with God.”<sup>73</sup> The lack of an object has caused great debate among scholars. Fee suggests that the independent work of Moule and Hoover pointing out that the formation of Greek nouns where the ending is “-mos” does not ordinarily refer to a concrete expression of the verbal idea in the noun but to the verbal idea itself.<sup>74</sup> This would mean that “...Christ did not consider ‘equality with God’ consisting of ‘grasping’ or being ‘selfish’; rather Jesus

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<sup>69</sup> Friberg Greek Lexicon, BibleWorks LLC Version 5.0.

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Francois Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, trans. from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition A. W. Heathcote, (London: Epworth Press, 1979), 97.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Fee, 204.

<sup>72</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, D. Litt., D.D., eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Minnesota: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. I, 1991, 472-74.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Fee, 205.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

rejected this popular view of kingly power by ‘pouring himself out’ for the sake of others.”<sup>75</sup> Being God, Jesus was not disposed to think of himself or his position as God but out of a great love for humanity, he put that love into active service by taking the form of a man. Being fully God he became fully man out of love for others. This is the very attitude the Philippians are to copy. Regardless of their position they are to see themselves as servants of others in the way that Jesus Christ did.

In verse 7, the next two Greek words have a bearing not only on the attitude the Philippians were to copy, but reveal the means in which God became human in Jesus Christ—his incarnation (vs.7). There has been debate over the concept of “emptying himself”. Various interpreters have suggested the following explanations.<sup>76</sup>

- The kenotic view is Jesus gave up the form of God in order to experience the fullness of humanity.<sup>77</sup>
- The non-technical sense suggests that Jesus became poor in a figurative way.<sup>78</sup>
- The sociological theories suggest that Jesus became a member of the slave class.<sup>79</sup>
- There are incarnational ideals—that Jesus taking the form of a servant relates directly to the incarnation and carries forward the sequence of thought in the hymn to that point of time when the pre-existent One becomes the Incarnate One.<sup>80</sup>
- Kasemann hypothesized that Jesus placed himself under demonic powers.<sup>81</sup>
- Jeremias suggested that the interpretation rests with understanding the role of the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Martin, 165-196.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 177.

servant of Isaiah or the “Ebed Yahweh portrait”.<sup>82</sup>

- Schwiezer interpreted it as Jesus becoming the righteous sufferer.<sup>83</sup>

Which view best exegetes the text in its context?

The third word “*ekenosen*” (“he made himself nothing”) is similar to the use of “*harpagmon*” in verse 6 which has no object for Christ to “seize” in a selfish vein, but rather points to what is the opposite of God’s character—that he took the form of a servant out of the motivation of love for others. The verb, “*ekenosen*”, does not have a genitive qualifier. “He simply ‘emptied himself,’ poured himself out.”<sup>84</sup> Fee explains, “The modifier is expressed in the modal participle that follows; he ‘poured himself out by having taken on the ‘form’ of a slave.” God’s essence was not altered, diminished or changed in any substance when God became incarnate. Paul’s point is to emphasize that Jesus was fully, in every way, divine. His divinity was in no way diminished by taking on human form.

The fourth and last term “*homoiomati*” (“in human likeness”) usually means “likeness”, “form”, or appearance”.<sup>85</sup> Schneider states that the basic meaning can be applied in two ways. It can mean “the equal likeness” of an original or at other times it means a resemblance of the original.<sup>86</sup> Did Christ as God become fully man, completely and in the fullest sense, or did he merely present the picture of a man, which appeared like a man when in fact he remained in the world as a divine being? Weiss argues that Paul, in Philippians 2:7, does not say, *expressis verbis*, that he became man by the assumption of our nature, because he dare not express the nature as in the grip of the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Fee, 210.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Martin, 199.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 200.



demonic power of sin. Yet Christ did appear on earth in what appeared to human eyes as an earthly form which enveloped His divine form.” Weiss believes that his appearance was only a “disguise, appropriate to the role which he played here”.<sup>87</sup> If this interpretation is followed it would mean that Jesus was not fully human because of the problem of sin corrupting all flesh.

Fee suggests the debate over “*homoiomati*” has more to do with a scholars’ philosophical theology than with the text.<sup>88</sup> He suggests Paul’s choice of this term fits the early church’s belief that Christ did not cease to be divine in becoming fully human. The ambiguity of “*homoiomati*” emphasizes how Jesus is similar to our humanity in some respects and dissimilar in others. He is similar in his full humanity. He was “like” in the sense of “the same as”. He was dissimilar in that he was sinless (Rom 8:3) while in the “likeness” of sinful flesh. Being fully human he never ceased in being fully God. Fee concludes that “he was God living out a truly human life, all of which is safeguarded by this expression.”<sup>89</sup>

As fully God and fully human what was Jesus’ purpose in coming? Paul writes that Jesus “...humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!” These two phrases describe the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The phrase “humbled himself” echoes “emptied himself” from verse 7. Humility was a slave virtue and aptly describes the attitude a slave would assume in the servant position.<sup>90</sup> The verb in the active aorist tense and not the passive suggests a voluntary submission which might be a

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Fee, 212.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Fee, 213.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Thurston and Ryan, 83.

moral point Paul is wishing to make.<sup>91</sup> That voluntary submission as a servant which Jesus gave was to the extreme limits and without condition. It went even to a death by means of a torturous instrument of condemnation. The cross was reserved as the punishment for the most heinous criminals. Only non-Roman citizens could be tortured to death in this way. Crucifixion was for the lowest order of society; slaves died by crucifixion.<sup>92</sup> The importance of his death is that as humans die so did this Jesus who was fully God and fully human experience death. This, then, is the scandal of the cross. The God who was worshipped had been crucified as a state criminal. This is what Paul emphasizes for the Philippians to remember in their suffering for the Gospel. “The God who did it this way ‘gifts’ us to ‘suffer for his sake’ as well (Philippians 1:29).”<sup>93</sup>

It is in these last three verses of this text (Philippians 2:9-11) that Paul brings to a climax the hymn with the concluding exaltation of Jesus as Lord. In his exaltation some have thought that this means Christ was rewarded with what he could not “seize” in verse 6. He was given a higher position than the one he had before becoming a man. This does not fit the context of the verses we have just covered. Paul is pointing out that through Jesus’ submission as a lowly servant, God exalted him above all others. The verb “highly exalted” speaks of Christ being exalted to the highest possible degree. Christ is lifted up with the kind of exaltation that befits his divine station.<sup>94</sup> He was given the name that is above every name. But what is the name?

Scholars have debated whether the “name” given is “Jesus” or “Lord”. Moule has argued that because of verse 10 (“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”) the name

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<sup>91</sup> Markus Bockmuhl, *A Commentary on The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Cadwick, D.D, FBA, (London: A&C Black,1997) 138.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Thurston and Ryan, 83.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Fee, 218.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Bockmuhl, 141.

must be Jesus. This would mean that God has highly exalted Jesus by bestowing upon him a name of significance that excels all other names. Most scholars believe that the purpose of this passage is to identify that the name Jesus is bestowed with the title “Lord”, therefore the name equivalent of Yahweh. The reason for such interpretation is the twofold result clause, “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess”, which borrows language from Isaiah 45:23, “By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”<sup>95</sup> It is Yahweh who is worshipped and obeisance is given. Paul makes it plain that the worship to be given to Yahweh is also to be given to Jesus “the Lord”. “The Lord” is this name given to Jesus.

Paul reminds the Philippians they are suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ as the Lord. This confession they have received and believed will one day become visible and evident to the entire world or cosmos. There is coming a day when all of creation will give honor and acknowledge Jesus Christ’s authority.

In conclusion it is evident from the New Testament that the early church had come to understand the meaning of “Jesus is Lord”, and believed and preached it. This Jesus of Nazareth was one person fully human and fully divine. Though Jesus was human he was without sin. Though he was fully God incarnate he took the role of a servant to accomplish God’s eternal plan of redeeming sinful humanity through the work of the cross.

The early church taught of Jesus’ preexistence as God. He was with the Father and was the creator of heaven and earth (Colossians 1:6). The early church preached that Jesus alone is Lord and that the resurrection was a pivotal point in history where God

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Fee, 224.

fulfilled his covenant promises of the Old Testament by sending God's Son to atone for human sin and to offer the gift of eternal life. Though this knowledge was not fully developed before the resurrection, God, the Holy Spirit, brought to the disciples' remembrance the teaching which Jesus had proclaimed and the miracles which testified to his Lordship.

Under the Holy Spirit's influence they preached a simple but profoundly informed message with three points: Christ came, Christ died, and Christ was raised. The confession "Jesus is Lord" was the earliest expression of that faith. When a person made that profession it included the belief that God was with us in the flesh, that Jesus was the full and final revelation of God, and that God raised Jesus bodily from the dead and thereby exalting him above every power, authority and position. In the resurrection God publicly made Jesus known as the long awaited Messiah whose coming would usher in a new age and that God had exalted him to the highest authority of Lord.

Salvation is to be found in him and through him. "There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them."<sup>96</sup> This salvation is freely given to anyone who confesses with their mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. With this simple confession the early church preached the superiority of Jesus Christ over all rulers, powers and authority.

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<sup>96</sup> Acts 4:12 (NLT).

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, AS EXPRESSED IN THE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

In light of the New Testament preaching that “Jesus is Lord”, how does the PCUSA express this truth in its creeds and confessions? What does the PCUSA mean when it proclaims “Jesus is Lord”? In this chapter the writer will examine the Lordship, the person and work of Jesus Christ, as expressed in the creeds and confessions of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). The Book of Confessions is the first part of the denomination’s constitution. The second part is called the Book of Order which covers matters of government, worship and discipline. This chapter will particularly investigate how the denomination’s theological declarations of the Lordship of Jesus Christ should inform and aid the pastor in preaching that the “Jesus is Lord”.

A church report states the following, “The task of preaching is to proclaim the God we meet in Jesus Christ through the biblical witness, not to proclaim the theology of the confessions. Nevertheless, preachers may, and should also be ‘instructed,’ ‘led,’ and ‘continually guided’ by the confessions as they choose and interpret their biblical texts and prepare their sermons.”<sup>97</sup> The language used here is important. “May” signifies practice that is permissible but not required. “Should” signifies practice that is strongly

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<sup>97</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions, The Confessional Nature of the Church, xxviii.

recommended. Since it is permissible and strongly recommended that the theological declarations inform and aid the pastor in preaching, a beginning to such guidance is to first understand the authority the Book of Confession has in the structure of the church's polity.

It is first helpful to understand that these eleven (11) creeds and confessions represent three categories of the church's history. As a summary, these categories identify Presbyterianism as a part of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ, nourished in the Protestant Reformation and express the Reformed Tradition. We will examine the creeds and confessions using this system of category.

The first category is the "early creeds". This category includes the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed and since these creeds deal with the foundational beliefs about the person of Christ, more attention will be given to them than to the rest of the creeds and confessions. They lay the foundation for Christology in all later confessions and are universal in that all Christian Churches acknowledge them as confessions.

The second category represents confessions from the period of the Reformation. This category includes the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism. These are expressions of faith that were written under the influence of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's when believers rediscovered the teaching of the Scriptures apart from the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The last category contains what are termed "modern creeds." This category includes the Theological Declaration of Barman, The Confession of 1967 and a Brief Statement of

Faith. These are confessions which were written to express the church's stand on issues relating to justice issues of the modern era.

Historically, these eleven confessions identify what it means to be Presbyterian. Identifying itself as part of the Church Universal, the denomination expresses and proclaims the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Presbyterians recognize and affirm the canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup>

The PCUSA's theology is defined in the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation which led to a rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords--grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone--embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, the PCUSA's theology is defined by the doctrine of Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God, who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Along with this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

- The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;
- Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., G-2.0300.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., G-2.0400.

- A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;
- The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.<sup>100</sup>

Taken as a whole, these eleven creeds and confessions proclaim Jesus “Lord” (*Lord Jesus*) 47 times. A fair question to ask is, “What purpose do these creeds and confessions serve in the denomination and why eleven of them?”

The Book of Order states that the purpose of these confessional statements is to declare to its members and to the world its faith and to bear witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ. Together the creeds and confessions declare to church members and to the world who and what the denomination is (*its identity*), what the denomination believes (*its faith*), what the denomination resolves to do (*its mission*).<sup>101</sup> The creeds and confessions are an authority for the denomination in the following ways;

- in its’ study and interpretation of the Scriptures,
- in summarizing the essence of Christian tradition,
- in directing the church in maintaining sound doctrines and
- In equipping the church for its work of proclamation.

Though authoritative, the confessions are understood to be subordinate standards. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While they are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. The constitution declares that they are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., G-2.0500.

<sup>101</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, G-2.0100 (Italics are the author’s addition).



nor may they be ignored or dismissed. They are so important to Presbyterian identity that the church is to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith they express. Their importance is further emphasized by a more exacting amendment process required to change them than the other constitutional matters of government, worship, or discipline. Though changing a creed or confession is possible it can only be done by the conviction of the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ. This openness to a change in the standards of doctrine is based on the openness expressed in the words “Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda,” that is, “The church reformed, always reforming,” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.<sup>102</sup> Does this mean that Presbyterians are open to reforming or changing the understanding of the teaching of the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Yes, but only from the context of the Word of God (the Scriptures) and the call of the Holy Spirit. Since humans are sinful and councils can make errors in expressing the faith, Presbyterians are always open to the authority of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures that give witness to him.

With this rich confessional heritage to draw from, the question still must be answered, “How is Jesus Christ preached in light of the confessions?” Is he “Lord” as expressed by the early church or has the denomination being “reformed, always reforming” developed a new expression of “Jesus is Lord”? To answer this question we must look to the early confessions as a key in understanding the denomination’s teaching on Jesus as Lord.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., G-2.0200.

## EARLY CREEDS

In the first three centuries, the Church found itself in a hostile environment. On the one hand, it grappled with the challenge of relating the language of the gospel, developed in a Hebraic and Jewish-Christian context, to a Graeco-Roman world. On the other hand, it was threatened not only by persecution, but also by ideas that were in conflict with the biblical witness. Rogers suggests that though the churches confessed “Jesus is Lord” there was no official or formal unity of doctrine by which all churches adopted.<sup>103</sup> Some scholars, like James Dunn in his book, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, have suggested that this particular formula may have been the hallmark of a Christian, long before a more developed, complex and rigid “orthodoxy” emerged as the norm. Though there may be some truth in these assertions, Gerald Bray cautions any blanket acceptance of the suggestion that the bare statement, “Jesus is Lord”, united women and men of very different theological outlooks in a common confession. He states, “The Early Church was not a confederation of divergent theological positions united by a form of words to which all could assent in good conscience.” In fact he believes that all the evidence suggests that the Early Church was a close-knit community which shared a comprehensive set of beliefs, even if these were not always set down in writing.<sup>104</sup> He sites as evidence for this comprehensive set of beliefs the New Testament and particularly the Apostle Paul’s Christological passage in Philippians 2. As time passed, traditions in the Church were formed. Before Nicaea, Christians in various regions had baptismal confessions that agreed with each other on all major points. The wording was

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<sup>103</sup> Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1985), 39.

<sup>104</sup> Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, (Leicester, England, Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 92.

different and few had any detail as to how the various points confessed were to be understood. Apparently candidates for baptism into the Church were asked a number of questions to discover whether they had mastered the basic teaching of the faith. Though there was not any uniform formula, the differing questions followed a Trinitarian pattern. Standardization of “the faith” was a slow process which was not completed until centuries later.

### **The Apostles’ Creed**

The Apostles' Creed was not written by apostles but it does reflect the theological formulations of the first century church. The creed's structure may be based on Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a time when most Christians were illiterate, oral repetition of the Apostles' Creed, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, helped preserve and transmit the faith of the western churches.<sup>105</sup> Before the formulation of the creed, many new Christians did not always understand the biblical context of lordship. Candidates for membership in the Church, having undergone a lengthy period of moral and doctrinal instruction, were asked at baptism to state what they believed. They responded in the words of this creed.<sup>106</sup>

The reason this creed was written was to combat the teaching of a man named Marcion. He was a Christian living in Rome in the second century and threatened the Church's understanding of Jesus as Lord through what he preached. Marcion read the Old Testament as referring to a tyrannical God who had created a flawed world. He

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<sup>105</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, 6.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

believed that Jesus revealed, in contrast to a tyrannical God, a good God of love and mercy. For Marcion, then, Jesus was not the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets, and the Old Testament was not Scripture. Marcion proposed limiting Christian “Scripture” to Luke's gospel (less the birth narrative and other parts that he felt expressed Jewish thinking) and to those letters of Paul that he regarded as anti-Jewish. His views developed into a movement that lasted several centuries.<sup>107</sup>

Around A.D.180, Roman Christians developed an early form of the Apostles' Creed to refute Marcion's teaching. They affirmed that the God of creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. They also affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the resurrection of the body.<sup>108</sup>

Perhaps the most curious element of the second article is the claim that Jesus “descended into hell.” Although several passages in the New Testament were early considered to be references to such a descent (e.g., Acts 2:27-31; Romans 10:7; Colossians 1:18; 1 Peter 3:19; 4:6), it was not mentioned in a creed until the mid-fourth century. Interpretations have varied. According to a prominent early view, the descent refers to Christ's liberation of the faithful of the Old Testament. A somewhat later view interpreted the descent in terms of Christ's victory over the kingdom of Satan. This latter understanding is consistent with the very ancient view that what is meant by Christ's

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

ascension, seat at the right hand of God, and coming judgment is, in fact, his victory over death and evil.<sup>109</sup>

This language of the Apostles' Creed was used to counter other heresies as they emerged over the centuries. The designations of Jesus as Son and as Lord were titles used to teach the importance of Jesus' birth, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and anticipated coming again in judgment. The titles were used to describe Jesus' distinctive human activity. They passed on an orthodox understanding of Jesus' humanity that countered the false teaching of groups like Docetists and Gnostics who denied Jesus' genuine humanity. The doctrine that He was "born from the Virgin Mary," which is sometimes used today as evidence of the deity of Jesus, was in the early centuries used to prove his humanity: He was born of a woman as are all of us. In contrast, the assertion that He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" was employed centuries later to argue (against Adoptianism) that the Savior, although human, was also divine from the moment of conception. It is one of the earliest examples of how the early church persevered in maintaining orthodox teaching on Jesus as Lord of all.

### **The Nicene Creed**

The Nicene Creed was the first and only creed used ecumenically by the vast majority of Christians throughout the world. "For more than fifteen hundred years, it has been the hallmark of orthodoxy."<sup>110</sup> Jack Rogers comments that being the first in order in the Book of Confessions, "It reminds us that the distinctive beliefs of the Reformed faith are those we hold in common with all Christians from the earliest times and to the present

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<sup>109</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, Study Edition, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 1.

day. The deity and humanity of Jesus Christ and the personal reality of the Holy Spirit are primary among those catholic distinctives.”<sup>111</sup>

The background for its writing is important. In A.D. 312, Emperor Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. “One God, one Lord, one faith, one Church, one empire, one emperor” became his motto. The new emperor soon discovered that “one faith and one Church” were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ, long a point of controversy.

Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, asserted that the divine Christ, the Word through whom all things have their existence, was created by God before the beginning of time. Therefore, the divinity of Christ was *similar* to the divinity of God, but not of the *same essence*. Arius was opposed by the bishop, Alexander, together with his associate and successor, Athanasius. They affirmed that the divinity of Christ, the Son, is of the same substance as the divinity of God, the Father. To hold otherwise, they said, was to open the possibility of polytheism, and to imply that knowledge of God in Christ was not final knowledge of God. It also would open the possibility of further questions dealing with the doctrines of the Trinity and the doctrine of the atonement.

To counter a widening rift within the Church, Constantine convened a council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. A creed reflecting the position of Alexander and Athanasius was written and signed by a majority of the bishops. Nevertheless, the two parties continued to battle each other. In A.D. 381, a second council met in Constantinople. It adopted a revised and expanded form of the A.D. 325 creed, now known as the Nicene Creed.

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Rogers, 39.

Though the council was called by the emperor for personal reasons, the Church clearly stated its view that Jesus is God, not a second or lesser god, making clear that there is only one God. Though they used the language and analogies that need to be clarified for a contemporary audience, the decisions they made remain the bedrock of our faith. The fact that the decision was eventually confirmed by the whole Church in spite of all the difficulties shows it was the bishops who knew and loved the gospel who finally made the decisions.<sup>112</sup> As the creed is read the first paragraph affirms one true God, Father, and Creator of all things. The distinctiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ is expressed in the second paragraph;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.<sup>113</sup>

The Early Church set about the difficult task of determining, in the light of Scripture, how Jesus could be God and man at the same time. It is true that the process took centuries but in that time the Early Church worked to reconcile two incompatible beings into an indivisible whole. Was Jesus “like” or of “similar” substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father or was he of the “same” substance (*homoousios*) with the Father? From their study and reflection upon the whole of the Scriptures, the early Christians formulated a confession that remained faithful to the apostolic teaching and combated numerous

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., The Book of Confessions, Study Edition, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 3.

heresies. The necessity of correctly expressing the meaning of the incarnation was vital if the message of the Gospel was going to continue to be preached. “If God actually came in the flesh of a human being and if that God/person lived, suffered, died, and rose again for our sakes, then we can be united with God.”<sup>114</sup>

Bray puts it succinctly, “Without an adequate framework for their ideas, the early Christians were almost certain to fail in their attempts to explain their faith. The Early Church needed the right language in order to express its faith clearly, in exactly the same way that modern missionaries have to find the right concepts in which to preach the gospel to non-Christians. At the same time, however, they had to avoid compromising their essential beliefs. To achieve this dual purpose, Christians had to stake out the bounds of their faith both in the light of Scripture and against the background of contemporary non-Christian thinking.”<sup>115</sup>

Not surprisingly, the issue addressed concerning the person of Jesus Christ in the Nicene Creed is still under attack today. Is Jesus as Lord both divine and human—God and man—and how are modern Christians to preach intelligently on this doctrine? The Nicene Creed was written in answer to this question and affirmed the scriptural teaching that the eternal Word of God is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, being both divine and human and thus having two natures is one person. The incarnation remains a mystery which we cannot fully understand because of Christ’s uniqueness. What the Nicene Creed did was to formally protect that mystery of the incarnation from any heresy which would deny the teaching of Scripture by either resigning Jesus to just a

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Rogers, 50.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Bray, 72.



man or God having the appearance of man but only divine, or that he was some lesser god.

The scandal of this mystery for our modern empirical era is trying to resolve intellectually how God and man are made one. For Presbyterians, preaching “Jesus is Lord” affirms what the Scriptures teach and what the early confessions expressed about the person of Jesus. God has made Jesus Lord and Christ having raised him from the dead and giving him all authority in heaven and earth. Because of his uniqueness of being fully human as well as fully divine he has become the mediator between God and humanity. To preach of Jesus’ person and work in any way that omits his being fully God and fully human is to deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Any proclamation of salvation or of the nature of God taking on flesh cannot ignore or deny the substance of this doctrine as it is laid out in this first category of the “early creeds”. Therefore, Presbyterian preaching that is biblical and faithful to the witness of Scripture must be guided by these confessions.

## **PROTESTANT REFORMATION CONFESSIONS**

In the next category of the Book of Confessions are documents from the period of the Reformation, each originating in a different country: Scotland, Germany, Switzerland and England. These four centers of the Reformation remain significant in Reformed and Presbyterian theology.

## **The Scots Confession**

The Scots Confession was written at a turning point in the history of the Scottish nation. When the Queen Regent Mary of Guise died in her sleep in 1560, the Protestant nobility of Scotland was able to secure English recognition of Scottish sovereignty in the Treaty of Edinburgh. To the Scots, this favorable conclusion to the civil war with Mary's French-supported forces represented a providential deliverance from God.

The Scottish Parliament, having declared Scotland a Protestant nation, asked the clergy to frame a confession of faith. Six ministers, including John Knox, completed their work in four days. In 1560, the document was ratified by Parliament as “doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God.” Its development was significant in expressing a more thorough theology based on the Scriptures.

Beginning with a pledge of unconditional commitment to the triune God who creates, sustains, rules, and guides all things, the first eleven chapters of the Scots Confession narrate God's providential acts in the events of biblical history. The kirk (Church) of the present and future is continuous with the kirk of God's people going back to Adam. While affirming that the Bible is the norm by which the kirk judges itself, the Scots Confession also sees the Scriptures as a sacred history in which the present day church, through the Holy Spirit, participates until the end of time. God's providential deliverance is a continuing reality not merely relegated to the past.

One particularly major development was how the Church and the world could identify the true Church. A related question is, “How can the PCUSA be certain that its’ ministers are preaching what is representative of the true Church of Jesus Christ?” The Scots Confession sets forth three marks of the true and faithful Church: “the true

preaching of the Word of God,” “the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus,” and “ecclesiastical discipline . . . whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.”<sup>116</sup> “Cleave, serve, worship, trust” are key words in this document. As a call to action in a turbulent time, the Scots Confession reflects a spirit of trust and a commitment to the God whose miraculous deliverance the Scots had experienced firsthand.

That first mark of the Church, the true preaching of the Word of God, is emboldened in chapter six titled, “The Incarnation of Christ Jesus”.<sup>117</sup> The confession affirms what is taught about the Lord Jesus Christ from the Apostles and Nicene Creeds concerning the promise of God and the sending of the person of Jesus. Being...”true God and true man, two perfect natures united and joined in one person...we condemn the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius, and such others as did either deny the eternity of his Godhead, or the truth of his humanity, or confounded them, or else divided them.”<sup>118</sup>

In further restating and expounding on this incarnational doctrine, the next chapter (seven) titled, “Why the Mediator Had to Be True God and True Man”,<sup>119</sup> states that Christians must “...acknowledge and confess that this wonderful union between the Godhead and the humanity in Christ Jesus did arise from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all our salvation springs and depends.”<sup>120</sup> The confession sees the work of redemption tied directly to Jesus’ eternal identity and God’s sovereign

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<sup>116</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Scots Confession, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

will. The rule of the Lordship of Jesus Christ includes that effective grace for the election of believers, the means and way by which a person is made right with God through Christ's death, passion, burial and resurrection and culminated in Jesus' ascension.

By tying Jesus' eternal identity to his earthly work the confession guides the preacher to first uphold the biblical understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully human. Secondly it guides the pastor in proclaiming the possibility of salvation through the significance of Jesus' work of atonement for sin which is part of the eternal and immutable decree of God. There can be no forgiveness in any other. There is no other plan of salvation revealed by God for the redemption of humanity. There is no other name given whereby humanity must be saved.

### **The Heidelberg Catechism**

The background to the Heidelberg Catechism shows that the Reformation was not a singular movement. Soon after Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Reform movements sprang up throughout Europe. As Lutheran thought moved down the Neckar River, Reformed thought traveled up the Rhine from Switzerland. They met at Heidelberg, seat of the oldest university in Germany and capital of the province known as the Palatinate. Tension between Lutherans and Reformed Christians was intense. Because the Reformed did not believe in the real, bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine, Lutherans believed that Reformed Christians were desecrating the Lord's Supper.

In order to help bring an end to the controversy, Frederick the Elector, ruler of the Palatinate, asked two young men of Heidelberg, Zacharias Ursinus, professor of theology, and Kaspar Olevianus, a local preacher to the city, to prepare a catechism acceptable to both sides. They revised an earlier catechism that Ursinus had written, using its outline and some ninety of its questions and answers. Completed in 1562, the Heidelberg Catechism was published in January of the following year.

Each question of the catechism is personal, addressed to “you.” Each answer draws as much as possible on biblical language. Its theology is both catholic, universal in appeal, and evangelical, setting forth the gospel of Jesus Christ. Providing a basis for peaceful coexistence between Lutheran and Reformed Christians, the catechism denied that the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ but affirmed that “by this visible sign and pledge . . . we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit ....”<sup>121</sup>

The flow of the Heidelberg Catechism opens with two questions concerning our comfort in life and death. The knowledge that our only comfort is Jesus Christ frames the remainder of the catechism. Each of its three parts corresponds to a line of Romans 7:24-25 (NRSV), where Paul cries: “Wretched man that I am; Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Thus, questions 3 through 11 deal with our sin and guilt, questions 12-85 with the way in which God in Jesus Christ frees us, and questions 86 through 129 with the manner in which we express gratitude to God for redemption. Particularly important to

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<sup>121</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism, 41.

this thesis are questions 29 through 52. These questions deal with the biblical teaching on Jesus titled, “Of God the Son”<sup>122</sup>.

Question 34 asks, “Why do you call him OUR LORD?” The answer is “Because, not with gold or silver but at the cost of his blood, he has redeemed us body and soul from sin and all the dominion of the devil, and has bought us for his very own.”<sup>123</sup> Here the confession expounds the theme of Jesus’ ownership as Lord of those who believe in him. Through his work on the cross believers are purchased, body and soul, as God’s possession. This theme takes on more significance for preaching with question 43, “What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?” The confession states, “That by his power our old self is crucified, put to death, and buried with him, so that the evil passions of our mortal bodies may reign in us no more, but that we may offer ourselves to him as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.”<sup>124</sup>

From these questions it is evident that confessing “Jesus is Lord” is an acknowledgement that believers are called to a different lifestyle, morally, which is made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice, death and resurrection. The Christian has been redeemed from the rule of sin and the dominion of darkness that brought separation from God. This moral life is motivated by a spirit of thanksgiving on behalf of the believer and is a fulfilling of the law of God through the power of grace. Guided by this theme of grace, preaching must lift up Jesus Christ and his authority as Lord as the object of a Christian’s faith and thanks for deliverance from the power of sin and the impartation of a new life of the Spirit oriented in seeking to be and do what is pleasing to the Lord.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 33-36.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 35.

Finally in teaching of the grace of God, question 45 asks, “What benefit do we receive from ‘the resurrection’ of Christ?” It is answered with three points. First, by Jesus’ resurrection he has overcome death that he might make believers share in the righteousness which he has obtained for believers through his death. Second, believers are now raised by his power to a new life. Third, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge to believers of their blessed resurrection.

It is evident that the expectation of making Christ “Lord” is a changed life. The believer is delivered from a bondage to the reign of sin to a life now under the authority and power of Jesus Christ. This life is marked in a difference of affection and behavior concerning sin and concerning love for righteousness and the holiness of God. Preaching Christ as Lord should be guided by the biblical idea that Christ has come to lead his people away from those sins which once separated them from God. This new life is based on a Christ centered grace that empowers the believer to increasingly turn from what God has revealed in his commandments and laws as sinful to an obedience that comes by faith. Where once sin had mastery over the believer, Christ has overcome that reign of sin and replaced it with his own reign.

### **The Second Helvetic Confession**

The word “Helvetic” is Latin for “Swiss”, therefore, the setting of the Second Helvetic Confession is Swiss-German Reformed Protestantism. In 1531, Heinrich Bullinger succeeded Ulrich Zwingli as minister of the church in Zurich. Bullinger was a model Reformed minister. As a preacher, he expounded Scripture at least twice a week. As a scholar, he wrote Latin commentaries on many books of the Old Testament and on

every book of the New Testament except Revelation. As an educator, he initiated a system of schools for Zurich and was rector of the Carolinum which was a theological academy. A person with ecumenical and political concerns, he was in correspondence with leaders of the Reformation and with rulers throughout Europe. As a pastor, he welcomed religious refugees into his own home. When the plague swept through Zurich in 1564, he insisted upon ministering to the afflicted, even though he knew he might become infected and die. In 1561, Bullinger composed the document that later became known as the Second Helvetic Confession. He intended to attach it to his last will and testament to the Zurich church, but events in Germany soon brought it into the public arena.

The publication of the Heidelberg Catechism created trouble with Lutherans who considered it too Reformed in spirit. The churches of Switzerland adopted the confession as their new confession of faith and it went on to find a wide acceptance throughout Europe and beyond. It was translated into French, English, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic, and Turkish.

From the opening paragraphs it emphasizes the Church and its life. It affirms the authority of the Scriptures for the Church's government and reformation. By including an article on predestination, the confession asks the Church to trust in God's free and gracious election of its membership in Jesus Christ. At the same time, the confession addresses the practical life of the gathered community, detailing matters of worship, church order and conflict, ministry, the sacraments, and marriage.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, Second Helvetic Confession, 52.



The flow of the confession follows the teaching from the earlier creeds and the heresies they combated. In chapter 11, titled, “Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World”<sup>126</sup>, it restates that Jesus was truly God and truly human, having two natures in one person. It goes on to confess more deeply Jesus’ Lordship concerning his unique work of salvation.

The confession teaches that the Scriptures uphold Jesus Christ our Lord as the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world. This work of salvation encompasses believers in the past, present and future. Jesus “...saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world.”<sup>127</sup>

To support this claim the Second Helvetic Confession uses several significant texts of Scripture,<sup>128</sup>

- John 10:1, 7 and 8:56 where Jesus says he is not like the one “...who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber . . . I am the door of the sheep” and “Abraham saw my day and was glad.”
- Peter’s words in Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- Paul’s teaching in 1Corinthians 10:3 and following, “All our fathers ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ”.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 68-72.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

- In Rev. 13:8 the Apostle John says: “Christ was the Lamb which was slain from the foundation of the world”, and
- In the Gospel of John 1:29 John the Baptist testified that Christ is that “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”.

Because of these Scriptures, it follows the Heidelberg Catechism by proclaiming that the Church can “...profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah, that holy and blessed one whom all the types of the law and predictions of the prophets prefigured and promised; and that God appointed him beforehand and sent him to us, so that we are not now to look for any other.”<sup>129</sup>

In light of this great salvation it joins the Scots Confession by teaching Christians “...to give all glory to Christ, believe in him, rest in him alone, despising and rejecting all other aids in life.”<sup>130</sup> Concerning seeking after other ways of finding peace with God the confession warns that anyone seeking “...salvation in any other than in Christ alone, have fallen from the grace of God and have rendered Christ null and void for themselves (Galatians 5:4).”<sup>131</sup> It is a strong warning of a perversion of the gospel. Therefore, preaching that is biblical must also give warning to individuals who would seek to reason that God has supplied another way of salvation other than through Jesus Christ.

### **The Westminster Standards Background**

The most significant confession of Presbyterian thought has been the Westminster Confession with the accompanying Larger and Shorter Catechisms. It was

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

created in the turbulent year of 1643. Internal conflicts had nearly torn apart both England and the English Church. Political and religious problems were inseparable. Who should rule the Church? Who should rule the state? What power should the king have? What power should be given to Parliament, local councils, and assemblies?

There were three parties influencing the outcome. The Anglican party stood for royal rule in England with the sovereign also Head of the Church's government. The Presbyterian party sought to vest authority in elected representatives of the people, both in Parliament and in church presbyteries. An emerging third party, soon led by Oliver Cromwell, wanted local autonomy for churches and limited powers for both king and Parliament.

The English House of Commons adopted an ordinance calling for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England in a manner that was consistent with the Scriptures and would bring peace within the Church of that day. After the ordinance passed the House of Lords, an assembly to accomplish this work convened in Westminster Abbey.

The assembly included one hundred fifty-one people. Of that group, thirty were members of Parliament; the others were called "learned, godly, and judicious divines." Five Scottish clergymen were in attendance and had the right of discussion but not vote. Churches in Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the American colonies were invited to send delegates, though none came. The assembly held 1,163 sessions, finally concluding in 1649.

Needless to say the Westminster Assembly conducted its work in a crisis atmosphere. Even before the assembly met, civil war broke out between the contending

parties. But the assembly went to work and eventually completed the “Form of Presbyterian Church Government,” a “Directory of Public Worship,” “The Confession of Faith,” “The Larger Catechism,” and “The Shorter Catechism.” Each document was approved by the English Parliament, which asked the assembly to add scriptural proofs.

Cromwell's ascendancy precipitated the end of the assembly. In 1648, Pride's Purge forcibly excluded Presbyterian members from Parliament. With the execution of King Charles I in 1649, English Puritanism split into “Presbyterians” who protested the regicide, and “Independents” who supported it and aligned themselves with Cromwell.

Though never adopted in England the Scottish General Assembly adopted the Westminster Standards for use in the kirk (Church) in 1647 which replaced the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. The standards came to New England with the Puritans (Independents) and to the Middle Atlantic states with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. In 1729, the standards were adopted as the confessional position of the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies and have played a formative role in American Presbyterianism ever since.

The Westminster Confession affirms God's work from its beginning in creation to its end in resurrection and last judgment. God is first, last, and preeminent in all things. The confession begins with God's self-revelation in Scripture: God is the “...one living and true God, infinite in being and perfection, ...invisible, ...immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute.”<sup>132</sup> Out of nothing, God created all that is, including humans, whom God upholds, directs, and governs. Humans, however, did not remain in blessed harmony with God's will. Sin's

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<sup>132</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession, 124.

intervention, which God permitted but did not cause, resulted in corruption of the human condition and of humans' relationship to God. Yet, God has made a covenant of grace with humans; through Christ, relationship to God is restored. The Christian life nurtured by prayer, preaching, and the sacraments, and lived in grace and glory prepares for God's predetermined end of mercy (salvation of the elect) and of justice (damnation of the reprobate).<sup>133</sup>

In chapter eight, titled "Of Christ the Mediator", the confession lists eight articles concerning Jesus' uniqueness as the mediator between God and humans. This designation as mediator is important because it teaches the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in his person as the second member of the Trinity who was incarnate in human flesh and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ's work described as the offices to which he is given, namely;

- Our prophet, in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation,
- Our priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us, and
- Our king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

In these eight articles, footnotes to the Scriptures are referenced forty-two times citing over ninety different verses supporting each characteristic of the person and work of Jesus Christ as taught by the earlier creeds and confessions but now summarized in an orderly form.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 120.

## **MODERN CONFESSIONS**

The final category of confessions is a collection of statements that seek to address what it means to confess Jesus as Lord in the context of the Church's responding to justice issues within the culture of the modern era. All three of these documents assume a theological relationship with the creeds from the Early Church and the confessions from the Reformation period.

### **The Theological Declaration of Barmen**

The Theological Declaration of Barmen was written by a group of Church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party and of the so-called "German Christians," a popular movement that saw no conflict between Christianity and the ideals of Hitler's National Socialism.

In January 1933, after frustrating years in which no government in Germany was able to solve problems of economic depression and mass unemployment, Adolph Hitler was named chancellor. By playing on people's fear of communism and Bolshevism, he was able to persuade the Parliament to allow him to rule by edict. As he consolidated his power, Hitler abolished all political rights and democratic processes: police could detain persons in prison without a trial, search private dwellings without a warrant, seize property, censor publications, tap telephones, and forbid meetings. He soon outlawed all political parties except his own, smashed labor unions, purged universities, replaced the judicial system with his own "People's Courts," initiated a systematic terrorizing of Jews,

and obtained the support of Church leaders allied with or sympathetic to the German Christians.

Most Germans took the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism for granted and patriotic sentiments were equated with Christian truth. The German Christians exalted the racially pure nation and the rule of Hitler as God's will for the German people.

Nonetheless, some in the Churches resisted. Among those few determined Church leaders who did oppose the Church's captivity to National Socialism were pastors Hans Asmussen, Karl Koch, Karl Iraruer, and Martin Niemoller, and theologian Karl Barth. Following a number of regional meetings, these men assembled representatives of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches in Gemark Church, Barmen, in the city of Wupperthal, May 29-31, 1934. Among the one hundred thirty-nine delegates were ordained ministers, fifty-three church members, and six university professors.

The chief item of business was discussion of a declaration to appeal to the Evangelical churches of Germany to stand firm against the German Christian accommodation to National Socialism. The Theological Declaration of Barmen contains six propositions, each quoting from Scripture, stating its implications for the present day, and rejecting the false doctrine of the German Christians. These six propositions specifically address the meaning of confessing "Jesus is Lord" in a time when Christians were being tempted to trust in someone or something other than in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first proposition emphasized is that there is one Jesus Christ through whom salvation comes to humanity and that it is through the Scriptures that we have such

knowledge. “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.” (John 14:6; John 10:1, 9)<sup>134</sup>

The second proposition emphasized that Jesus alone is Lord of all and God has laid claim to rule of the whole life. “As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures. We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords--areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.” (1 Corinthians 1:30)<sup>135</sup>

The third proposition emphasized that because Jesus is Lord of all, the Church is to follow Jesus alone in the work of redeeming the world by remaining faithful to the gospel.

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions. (Ephesians 4:15, 16.)<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 249.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.



The fourth proposition emphasized that because Jesus is Lord of all, those who serve Christ must serve as servants to Christ alone. “The various offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give to itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.” (Matthew 20:25, 26.)<sup>137</sup>

The fifth proposition emphasized that because Jesus is Lord, Christians are called to render to God what belongs to God and to the state what God had designated.

Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The Church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things. We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State. (1 Peter 2:17.)<sup>138</sup>

The sixth and final proposition emphasized that because Jesus is Lord, the Church's existence is determined by its Lord and the Church's faithfully proclaiming Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. “The Church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead,

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 249-250.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 250.

and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.” (Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:9.)<sup>139</sup>

These six propositions demonstrate the conviction that Jesus is Lord of all and therefore to be honored and served above all others. Christians owe their allegiance to Jesus even above affection for the state. Preaching a message of Lordship must include the tenet that Jesus must be worshipped first above all things including personal politics or worldly ideas. The Church’s worship of Jesus Christ can never be compromised by being used in the plans of any person or organization out of a motivation for what is claimed by others as a worldly good.

### **The Confession of 1967**

In approving the Confession of 1967, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted its first new confession of faith in three centuries. The turbulent decade of the 1960s challenged churches everywhere to restate their faith. While the Second Vatican Council was reformulating Roman Catholic thought and practice, Presbyterians were developing the Confession of 1967.

The Confession of 1967 is built around a single passage of Scripture: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . .” (2 Corinthians 5: 19, NRSV). The first section, “God's Work of Reconciliation,” is divided into three parts: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. The second section, “The Ministry of Reconciliation” has two parts: the mission of and the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

equipment of the Church. The last section, “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation,” affirms the Church's hope in God's ultimate triumph.

The Confession of 1967 addresses the Church's role in the modern world and seeks to be responsive to developments in biblical scholarship. It asks the Church to “approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding”.<sup>140</sup> It calls the Church to obedient action, particularly in response to social problems such as racial discrimination, nationalistic arrogance, and family and class conflict. It sees the life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ as the pattern for the Church's mission today, and calls on all Christians to be reconciled to God and to one another. With the Confession of 1967, the Church also adopted a Book of Confessions that placed creeds from the early Christian Church (the Nicene and the Apostles' Creeds) and from the Reformation (the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession) alongside the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, adding two documents from the twentieth century (the Theological Declaration of Barmen and the Confession of 1967).

In Part I, God's Work of Reconciliation, in Section “A” titled, “The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ”, Jesus of Nazareth is referred to as “true humanity...realized once for all.”<sup>141</sup> It goes on to confess the meaning of that humanity as a Palestinian Jew who lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. Describing Jesus' life among the Jews and their rejection of him that led to his crucifixion, it goes on to give a faint reference to the meaning of the resurrection by stating, “God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord.” The rest

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<sup>140</sup> The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967, (paragraph 9.29), 257.

<sup>141</sup> The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967, 254.

of the confession is void of any theological declaration about Jesus' Lordship except to emphasize that the Church's ministry is to bring reconciliation. The reason for this is stated in the preface, "The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the Church to that unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today. This Confession is not a 'system of doctrine,' nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology. For example, the Trinity and the Person of Christ are not redefined but are recognized and reaffirmed as forming the basis and determining the structure of the Christian faith."<sup>142</sup>

Taking this into account the confession does not add any more insight to Christ's Lordship than in the context of the ministry of reconciliation to humanity.

### **A Brief Statement of Faith**

The 123rd General Assembly (1983) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the 195th General Assembly (1983) of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America approved and enacted the Plan for Reunion forming the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In the Articles of Agreement, which governed the reunion, it provided that:

1. The confessional documents of the two preceding Churches would be the confessional documents of the reunited Church.
2. A "Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith" would be prepared for possible inclusion in the Book of Confessions.
3. The "Brief Statement of Belief," adopted by the 102nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1962 as a summary of the historic

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<sup>142</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967, 252.

doctrine of that Church, would serve as a summary of the Reformed understanding of historic Christian doctrine set forth in Scripture and contained in the Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) until “A Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith” could be considered by the reunited Church.

While recognizing realities of diversity and disagreement in both the Church and the world, members of the drafting committee sought to articulate Presbyterians' common identity. Early in its discussions, the committee decided to write a statement of faith that could be used in worship. The committee drew extensively on the documents in the Book of Confessions and on Scripture for its formulations, and arranged them within a Trinitarian framework.

Unlike the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which move directly from Jesus' birth to his death, the statement emphasizes the significance of Jesus' ministry in Judea and Galilee. The Brief Statement of Faith emphasizes gender-inclusiveness. It underscores the role of both men and women in God's covenant, uses feminine as well as masculine imagery of God, and affirms ordination of both women and men. The statement also expresses concern for the integrity of God's creation.

The only contribution to our thesis is the Brief Statement's affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ at its beginning, “In life and death we belong to God”<sup>143</sup> and, at its end, “nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>144</sup> The Brief Statement of Faith concludes liturgically with the Church's familiar Trinitarian doxology of praise and thanksgiving.

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<sup>143</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, (10.1, line 1), 267.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., (10.05, lines 78, 79).

## SUMMARY

In examining the creeds and confessions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., there are two points that are in agreement in all eleven documents. First, the Lord Jesus Christ must first be understood in relationship to God; second, the confession of Jesus as Lord is a confession which is not first personal and individual in scope, but corporate. This confession and its meaning to believing members is the glue that holds the Church together and defines the identity of Jesus in relationship to God. In speaking of Christ as the head of the Church, the Book of Order reads, “All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body.”<sup>145</sup>

How, then, is “Jesus Christ is Lord” preached in light of the confessions? Since the creeds and confessions are given as a guide to expressing the faith it is important that preaching clearly communicate an understanding of a universal affirmation by the Church from every age to the true identity and work of God in Jesus Christ. Preaching is to lay claim to the person of Jesus Christ and the redemptive work of God and proclaim it as clearly as possible to a world in need of the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This survey of the creeds and confessions has shown that the Church’s belief about the Lordship of Jesus Christ is clarified by first understanding the Scripture’s teaching on Jesus’ identity as Lord and Messiah. As the Church wrestled with the meaning of these concepts there were various times when true orthodoxy was challenged

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<sup>145</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-1.0100.

by what others thought reasonable and rational descriptions of Jesus and what he did in coming into the world. The early creeds focus on the person of Jesus Christ. Before the Church could preach about what God had done in Jesus Christ it had to clarify who is the Lord. The Apostles and Nicene Creeds were written to communicate that Jesus was not just a man coming into this world as an agent of God. Jesus was not God taking on the guise of human appearance but still maintaining a divinity aloof from humanity. God was fully in Jesus and Jesus was fully in God. The Early Church expressed this truth by formulating the confession that Jesus was fully human and fully divine having two natures, God and man, yet distinctly one person. He is the unique God-man. Reformed preaching must be guided by this truth if it is to biblically convey the identity of Jesus Christ.

Guided by the confessions, Reformed preaching proclaims the work of God in the resurrection and reveals the identity of Jesus Christ as both Lord and Messiah. By raising Jesus from the dead, God elevated Jesus to an authority above all other authority. Any preaching concerning the issues of life and death can only be faithful in its orthodoxy as it affirms the historic fact of the resurrection. To deny the resurrection is to deny that Jesus is Lord. It is a denial of salvation accomplished in his work of atonement for humanity's sin and adoption of believers by God through Christ.

Reformed preaching proclaims that there is salvation in no other than through the work of Jesus Christ. By becoming the mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ bridges the gap that once existed because of sin. Through Jesus, believers have peace with God. By being delivered from the wrath and judgment of God, brought on by the wages of sin, believers are transferred from the kingdom of darkness and the reign

of sin into the kingdom of God where Jesus now masters those who look to him by faith. Through his death, resurrection and ascension believers are now reconciled to God, able to do the will of God and follow after God.

Reformed preaching proclaims victory for the believer over the reign of sin through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who comes to change the believer in personal affection and behavior. Because of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, a different lifestyle, morally, is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. A new heart is imparted to the believer that longs for holiness and righteousness on God's terms and reflects God's will. The believer is redeemed from the rule of sin. This moral life, made possible through communion with Jesus Christ, is motivated by a spirit of thanksgiving on behalf of the believer and is a fulfilling of the law of God through the power of grace. Guided by this theme of grace, preaching is able to bring the message of hope, forgiveness and restoration to the Church and the world.



## CHAPTER 4

### HOW BIBLICAL PREACHING CAN RESTORE THEOLOGICAL UNITY TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

Unity is a quality that all Church members are seeking to create or maintain. How do Presbyterians believe there can be unity in a diverse Church? It is the proposition of this writer that the beginning of reclaiming the PCUSA's unity is to return to an expository method of preaching as taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson<sup>146</sup> to illuminate the doctrines of the creeds and confessions for the denomination to recover its identity. This chapter will focus on how the theological conflict of Lordship threatens the unity of the Church and how biblical preaching is vital to regaining a sense of Reformed theology that unites behind expositing the Word of God rightly.

The PCUSA declares Jesus Christ is to be Lord and the Head of the Church.<sup>147</sup> The title "Lord" is used to express the identity and power of Jesus Christ. In calling Him "Lord", the denomination confesses that Jesus calls the Church into being. Jesus gives the Church its faith and life and authority. The denomination claims itself as an extension of the New Testament Church.<sup>148</sup> How that title "Lord" is defined by any denomination determines whether the organization is faithful to the purpose and mission of the Church. The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity was commissioned for the purpose of discerning the PCUSA's Christian identity. Clarifying

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., Robinson.

<sup>147</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-1.0100 a.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, G-1.0100 d.

the meaning of the title “Lord” as it relates to Jesus of Nazareth is part of the task force’s work. Therefore the denomination’s identity is informed by what it teaches concerning the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. That confession must be clearly communicated within the denomination so that a true unity is built on the basis of Jesus’ Lordship.

This concept of “the unity of believers” as the Church of Jesus Christ is a central belief and tenet of the PCUSA’s constitution. The PCUSA’s constitution clearly lays out that the Church is created and called by God to have unity in mission. The Church is to have oneness in its expression, “...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all”.<sup>149</sup> It is to have a visible oneness where a diversity of persons, gifts, understandings is brought together, as an important sign of the unity of God’s people.<sup>150</sup> Unity is a gift from God. Presbyterians believe the Scriptures teach that Christ gives to his Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. Jesus, himself, taught that a house divided will not stand<sup>151</sup> and He prayed that the Church, His body, would be one.<sup>152</sup> In light of this, Presbyterians affirm the necessity of unity. The Book of Order of the PCUSA states, “Insofar as Christ’s will for the Church is set forth in Scripture, it is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the Church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>153</sup>

Though the scriptural teaching of unity is clear, the Presbyterian Church (USA) recognizes the existence of divisions of believers into different denominations. It also maintains that these divisions do not destroy the Church’s unity. Divisions may obscure

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<sup>149</sup> Ephesians 4:5-6 (NIV).

<sup>150</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-4.0200ff.

<sup>151</sup> Matthew 12:25 (NIV).

<sup>152</sup> John 17:22-23 (NIV).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., G-1.0100c.

unity for both the Church and the world, but the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirms its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ and is committed to the reduction of that obscurity by being willing to seek and to maintain communion and community with all other branches of the one, Catholic Church.<sup>154</sup> If unity in Christ is affirmed in a plenary sense with other denominations, what principle of unity brings identity to the PCUSA denomination? The answer is clarified in the principles of Church order.

The inclusive spirit of the PCUSA's constitution is tempered by what are called the principles of Church Order. The "Historic Principles of Church Order" have been a part of the denomination's common heritage and are foundational to the Presbyterian concept and system of Church government. One of these historic principles is the "Right of Judgment," meaning that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men<sup>155</sup> which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."<sup>156</sup> An individual has a right and responsibility to exercise her or his conscience concerning the understanding of the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, but that freedom does have a limit.

Along with that freedom of conscience is also the historic principle of "Corporate Judgment" meaning that "every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., G-4.0203.

<sup>155</sup> The meaning here is inclusive of male and female.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, G-1.0301, This quotation may also be found in The Westminster Confession of Faith, Book of Confessions, 6.109.

government which Christ hath appointed.”<sup>157</sup> This corporate judgment is where the denomination lays out the principles of its unity. That unity must be guided and expressed by the creeds and confessions of the Church which is the first part of the Constitution called the “Book of Confessions.” In the creeds and confessions, the PCUSA expresses its faith and bears witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ. In these confessional statements the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. declares to its members and to the world who and what the denomination is, what the denomination believes, what the denomination resolves to do.<sup>158</sup>

If unity is expected and taught by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, upheld in the principles of Church Order, and based on the doctrinal teaching of the creeds and confessions of the Church, why is there division on matters of Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, and ordination standards? Is there not a standard that is expressed through the confessional documents? Is it possible that the Scriptures and the creeds and confessions are not being interpreted correctly or even understood in their theological confessions? Or perhaps they are simply being ignored as not relevant today.

Historically, Presbyterians have upheld the Reformation principle that Holy Scripture is the rule of faith and life. It is a foundational cornerstone of Reformed Theology. This is the authority the Church uses to express a true and faithful confession of its faith. Therefore the issue of biblical authority and interpretation is crucial to the life of the PCUSA. Scripture has always been considered the one, enduring, trustworthy guide to faith and practice.<sup>159</sup> Presbyterians do not rely on Popes, Bishops or Priests as

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., G-2.0100a.

<sup>159</sup> Biblical Authority and Interpretation; A Resource Document Received by the 194<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1982) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 34.

authorities who reveal the will of God. The Scriptures, through the revealing work of the Holy Spirit, studied and interpreted by the community of faith, is the authority that informs what is preached and proclaimed. Therefore, the authority behind the confession “Jesus is Lord” is supported by the way the denomination interprets the Holy Scriptures. This affirmation of scriptural authority, in some formulation, is a structural element of all Reformed confessions. Because of this foundational belief, it could easily be assumed that this basic principle of the rule of faith and life represents a focal point of unity and a sign of commonality among Presbyterians who are in the Reformed tradition; however, that is not the case.

Fortunately the PCUSA has developed two resources to guide Presbyterian interpretation of the Scriptures and confessions. The first is the *formulating principles* of interpreting Scripture, written by the two previous Presbyterian denominations that united in 1983 to form the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The second resource, the Confessional Nature of the Church Report, was added to the preface of the Book of Confessions by the 209<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1997)<sup>160</sup> as an attempt to help members understand how the confessions are actually used within the denomination and to clarify and encourage their proper use. These resources are an attempt to bring a unity of approach to what Presbyterians claim as authoritative in matters of a faithful confession that Jesus is Lord.

In response to the growing crisis in the denomination, Dr. Jack Rogers has written a book to help members understand and apply these guidelines in our day of controversy. He points out that, “Although guidelines for studying Scripture and the Confessions are helpful for personal and devotional reading and reflection, most were designed for and are especially helpful in times of controversy in the Church. Controversy surrounding the

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<sup>160</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, xi.

interpretation of Scripture and the Confessions has not been unusual in the church.”<sup>161</sup>

Rogers goes on to admit, “Even if we all were to follow the guidelines in this book, we would still not necessarily all think alike, nor would all of our problems automatically be solved. We would, however, be better able to talk together and be sure that we are dealing responsibly with all of the relevant issues. Having common, shared methods of interpretation would help us to be the Church—in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and guided by our confessions—when we meet difficult and potentially divisive issues. That is worth the time and effort.”<sup>162</sup>

Though these Presbyterians principles are helpful and even needed today in understanding the authority and interpretation of the Scriptures and the confessions, it is the proposition of this thesis that these guidelines are grouped as generalized principles that do not include a methodology of exposition and application of the Scriptures. The beginning of reclaiming the PCUSA’s unity is to return to an expository method of preaching such as the one taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson.<sup>163</sup> It is through expository preaching of the Scriptures that the doctrines of the creeds and confessions of the denomination are illuminated, given authority and inspire unity among members. In order to explain this more clearly an overview of the formulating principles will be helpful.

Before the reunion of the two denominations that formed the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), both the Northern and the Southern Presbyterians adopted position statements, Biblical Authority and Interpretation in 1982

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<sup>161</sup> Jack Rogers, *Reading the Bible and the Confessions: The Presbyterian Way*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., Robinson.

by The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), and Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture in 1983 by The Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS), that bequeathed a common approach to interpreting Scripture. These position statements probingly reveal a plurality of understanding of the authority of Scripture, “The truth is that this affirmation [*Holy Scripture is the rule of faith and life*<sup>164</sup>] is held and practiced among Presbyterians in a variety of ways. The authority of the Bible is understood differently by different groups and individuals. Different approaches are taken to the interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>165</sup> There are basically three different views of biblical authority influencing the denomination.

The first is the view that the Bible is a book of inerrant facts. It is a book of true facts and doctrinal propositions that can be organized into a logical system representing the mind and will of God. This view sees each word of the Bible as divinely chosen and inerrant in all things, including history and science. The Bible is considered to be the judge of human thought and is not to be judged by humans.

The second view is that the Bible is a witness to Christ who is the Word of God. The Bible must be approached by faith rather than by rational procedures. God cannot be known by the intellect alone but one must have a faith encounter with Jesus Christ for the Bible to be understood. The Holy Spirit is the instrument by which God in Christ encounters a person. The emphasis is on God’s act of self-revelation rather than on the process by which the Scripture was written. The authors’ inspiration is not denied but the stress is on the impact of the Holy Spirit on the reader.

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<sup>164</sup> Italics added by author.

<sup>165</sup> Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture: Position Statement Adopted by the 123<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (1983) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1.

Finally, the Bible is simply a divine message in human thought form. Social sciences such as psychology, sociology and anthropology provide crucial insight for a thorough understanding of Scripture. The message, communicated through human thought forms, speaks to all cultures despite its own ancient context, but to understand it a person must pay close attention to human words, neither presuming the meaning to be obvious, nor forcing meaning into arbitrary harmonies or preconceived theology. Metaphor rather than science is the communication medium.

Which of these views is Presbyterian? Admittedly all three views are being practiced within the denomination. Although there is a plurality of understanding of the authority of Scripture, the position statement of the denomination goes on to state that there are still guidelines that Presbyterians must follow in order to properly interpret the Scriptures. The denomination adopted these guidelines to help a theologically pluralistic Church establish some *formulating principles* to guide the interpretation of Scripture among Presbyterians. These formulating principles describe in an orderly fashion the Presbyterian approach to interpretation. They are given in two sections. The first section details principles for guiding exposition. The second section deals with application of what is expositied.

The formulating principles for guiding exposition are to help discover what the text says. These expositional guidelines include:

- the use of original languages,
- the employment of the best manuscripts,
- the priority of the plain sense of the text by defining literary units,
- the recognition of the cultural conditioning of the language and



- the understanding of social and historical circumstances.

These five guidelines are to help discover the meaning of the text. But finding the meaning of the text is only half the battle. A second section of *formulating principles* helps to correctly apply what is expositied.

The application guidelines suggest how the text is to be rightly used or how one should apply the meaning of the text to today. Presbyterians see these principles as a guide in applying the Scriptures in matters of faith and life. These application guidelines remind Presbyterians that...

- ...the purpose of the Scriptures is to provide the knowledge of what is necessary for the glorying of God and for human faith, life and salvation. They deal with questions about the ultimate origin, meaning, and goal of human life in relation to God, all of which are behind or beyond the scope of secular scientific and historical disciplines. Therefore, Scripture is to be rightly used with respect to this subject matter.<sup>166</sup>
- ...in matters of faith, life, and salvation, the Scriptures take precedence over all other authorities. Other authorities are not ignored and can be learned from, but the wisdom of all such additional authorities is subordinate to and subject to correction by Scripture. The centrality of Jesus Christ is God's revealing focus. In Christ, God deals decisively with humanity and constitutes the Church.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 19.

- ...an interpreter must search the whole of Scripture for all texts bearing on the question under consideration and using particular texts or groups of text in the light of the whole, therefore Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture.<sup>168</sup>
- ...the fundamental expression of God's will is the twofold commandment to love God and neighbor, and all interpretations of Scripture are to be judged by whether they offer and support the love given and commanded by God.<sup>169</sup>
- ....the Scripture is to be interpreted in light of the Christian community's past and present understanding of Scripture<sup>170</sup> realizing that all interpretation is fallible. "Every reading, confession and theology that refers to Scripture is subject to testing by further and more faithful searching of the Scripture to see if it is genuinely in accord with the Bible's witness."<sup>171</sup>
- ...the work of interpretation leads to God's authoritative and convincing work for us only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.<sup>172</sup>
- ...no interpretation of Scripture, based on a single principle of interpretation mentioned above, is to be accepted without testing it also by all the others that may apply, or by still further principles of interpretation that may help us in faithful, honest, and accurate use of Scripture.<sup>173</sup>

Since there is agreement among Presbyterians that there needs to be some formulating guidelines for the understanding and use of Holy Scripture, it is only reasonable that a method for expositing and applying the text would complement these guidelines.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 28.

Though these guidelines are helpful, they are still vague and of a general use in approaching a text. They do not give a methodology of exposition and application of interpreting the Scriptures that helps in going from the text of Scripture to the application of the text today. What is needed in addition to these guidelines is a method of expository preaching that accomplishes that task.

What is expository preaching? Robinson admits that a definition is difficult because “...preaching is a living interaction involving God, the preacher, and the congregation and no definition can pretend to capture the dynamic.” With that stipulation he suggests that expository preaching is ...”the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>174</sup>

Why should Presbyterians use the method of expository preaching? “The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching. It would be fatuous, however, to assume that everyone agrees with that statement.”<sup>175</sup> Robinson goes on to point out the frustration of many in ministry who “...face the pressing temptation to deliver some message other than that of the Scriptures—a political system (either right-wing or left-wing), a theory of economics, a new religious philosophy, old religious slogans, or a trend in psychology. Ministers can proclaim anything in a stained-glass voice at 11: 30 on Sunday morning following the singing of hymns. Yet when they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority. No longer do they

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., Robinson, pg. 21.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

confront their hearers with a word from God. That is why most modern preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it.”<sup>176</sup>

If Presbyterian Ministers, Elders and Deacons are truthful in affirming their ordination vow, “Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?”<sup>177</sup>, then there must be a submission to the idea of a way to properly exposit the Scriptures that is in keeping with Presbyterian guidelines. Robinson’s expository method complements and accentuates the purpose behind the *formulating principles* used to interpret the Holy Scriptures. It does so by leading a person to deal directly with the text of Scripture whether that person believes that the Bible is a book of inerrant facts, or a witness to Christ who is the Word of God, or simply a divine message in human thought form.

The preacher is in the business of communicating a concept or idea. Robinson points out that forgetting that the Scriptures are also written for the purpose of communicating a concept or idea is a dangerous approach to the Scriptures.

Some conservative preachers have been led astray by their doctrine of inspiration and by a poor understanding of how language works. Orthodox theologians insist that the Holy Spirit protects the individual words of the original text. Words are the stuff from which ideas are made, they argue, and unless the words are inspired, the ideas cannot be guarded from error. While an orthodox doctrine of inspiration may be a necessary plank in the evangelical platform on biblical authority, this sometimes gets in the way of expository preaching. Although we examine words in the text and sometimes deal with particular words in the sermon, words and phrases should never become ends in themselves. Words are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., Robinson, 20.

<sup>177</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-14.0207b.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., Robinson, 20.

He goes on to suggest that any approach to the Bible should be concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the authors meant in the use of words that were chosen. “If we desire to understand the Bible in order to communicate its message, we must grapple with it on the level of ideas.”<sup>179</sup>

If Robinson’s definition of expository preaching is taken at face value then the preacher must first go to the text to discover the idea of the author. Once that idea is understood the preacher must then apply it to his own life experience through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The preacher “...must first learn to listen to God before speaking for God.”<sup>180</sup> Once the idea is understood from the text and in light of the preacher’s experience following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the final leg of the journey is from the preacher’s experience of the idea to applying it today for those listening. The preacher must apply that idea to the life of the congregation. How is one to do this triangle of communication in an effective and faithful way? Robinson suggests ten stages in developing and delivering an expository message.

The Presbyterian guidelines for expositing a text of Scripture encourages the preacher to go back to original languages using the best manuscripts available of the passage. The purpose of examining the text is to gain from them the plain sense of the text. To discover this, a preacher should define the literary unit of the text to understand its genre and to isolate the idea of the author. The examination of the text should also include the recognition of the cultural conditioning of the language and the social and historical circumstance that may help to clearly identify what is the author saying.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., Robinson, 23.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 27.

Robinson's first three stages of developing and delivering an expository message guides the expositor to fulfill these Presbyterian principles. The first stage is to select the passage to preach. At first this would seem simple enough until it becomes evident that the authors who wrote the Scriptures were not writing with the idea of dissecting their book or letter into chapter and verse. The expositor must look for the authors thought units. This must include a decision by the expositor on the thought development of the author within the genre being used. Robinson suggests a general principle to follow: "Base the sermon on a literary unit of biblical thought." Even when having to deal with a topic in preaching, the passage must be allowed to speak for itself.

The second stage is to study the passage and gather notes on the context of the passage. Since the passage has a wider context the preacher must first understand that the passage is not isolated but dependent on what came before and what comes after it. Robinson suggests reading different versions of the translations to determine the overall context. If there are differences in the translations the expositor should note that and research it more. The preacher is looking to discover the author's ideas or what the author is talking about. Robinson calls this searching for the author's subject.<sup>181</sup> The use of study aids such as lexicons, concordances, grammars, etc., is to help the preacher to arrive at the author's idea.

Stage three is discovering the exegetical idea of the passage. The study of the parts of the passage should lead to understanding the whole passage. It is at this point that the preacher should try to write out in the form of a question what the author is saying. The subject can be narrowed in its focus by the six questions of who, what, where, when, how and why. When the subject is narrowed the preacher can then turn to answering the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 61.

subject with the complement. The subject is “What is the author saying?” The complement is what completes the question of the subject. Once an expositor has the subject and the complement she or he can then use the two to form the exegetical idea of the passage. Once the exegetical idea is found, the expositor should be able to go to any part of the passage and see how that part supports and fits into the exegetical idea.

This brief overview of the first three stages demonstrates an effective methodology of expositing Scripture that takes into account the five Presbyterian guidelines. By following this progression, a Presbyterian’s expectation of using the original languages and the best manuscripts available of the passage in order to gain from the text the plain sense of the passage is accomplished. Identifying the literary unit of the text and studying its genre helps the expositor to isolate the concept of the author. The final study and analysis of the cultural conditioning of the language and the social and historical circumstance assists in clarifying what the author is saying. In comparing the Presbyterian guidelines with Robinson’s methodology of expositing the text, one can easily identify how effective this method is in getting to the meaning of the passage and the concept that the author is seeking to communicate. Finding the exegetical idea does not make a sermon. The expositor must go to the next step of analyzing the exegetical idea.

To build the bridge from the meaning of the text to the application of the meaning today, the preacher must begin to analyze the exegetical idea by asking three developmental questions.

“What does it mean?”<sup>182</sup> This developmental question can be pointed in different directions. It can be directed toward the Bible. Is the author explaining his concept? Here analyzing the passage to determine whether the author is writing to explain to his audience something helps the expositor see the need to explain the concept to today’s listeners. By asking the question, “What does it mean?” one may be probing the audience as well. Are there elements in the passage that the audience might need to have explained, if they just heard the exegetical idea? By asking this developmental question “What does it mean?” the preacher is dealing with explaining the passage so that the modern audience has their questions of meaning answered.

The second developmental question “Is it true?” centers on validity. Here the preacher must be careful. Robinson encourages the preacher:

While competence requires that we understand how the biblical writers established validity, it also demands that we wrestle with listeners' questions such as, ‘Is that true?’ and ‘Can I really believe that?’ ...Today we can count on an attitude of questioning and doubt. Our educational system and the mass media contribute to this pervasive skepticism. Advertisers have created an audience of doubters who shrug off dogmatic claims and enthusiastic endorsements, no matter who makes them, as nothing more than a pitch from the sponsor.

We do well, therefore, to adopt the attitude that a statement is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true. The fact that an assertion is in the pages of a leather-covered book does not necessarily make it valid. Instead, the Bible states reality as it exists in the universe, as God has made it and as He governs it. We would expect, therefore, the affirmations of Scripture to be demonstrated in the world around us. That is not to say that we establish biblical truth by studying sociology, astronomy, or archaeology, but the valid data from these sciences second the truth taught in Scripture.<sup>183</sup>

Here the confessions of the Church may support the author’s biblical truth. They second the truth taught in Scripture. A congregation expects a preacher to be aware of the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 82.



theological problems the text may raise. They expect to be informed of how the Church has dealt with those problems in the past. When used properly the confessions are a guide of Reformed teaching as the preacher explains that biblical idea from a confessional resource. Robinson encourages preachers to be honest with these ideas as she or he asks, “Would my audience accept that statement as true? If not, why not?” By wrestling with this developmental question the preacher will discover that there is much more to think about as the sermon is developed.

The final question to develop the exegetical idea is, “What difference does it make?” This relates to application. Understanding the truth of the passage is not a sermon. The preacher must relate the truth to the life of the congregation. The most effective sermons do this in a specific way.

Since the Presbyterian guidelines for application suggest how the text is to be rightly used or how one should apply the meaning of the text to today’s audience, the three developmental questions can utilize those guidelines in the sermon’s development. What is the text saying about God or a human’s faith, life and or the means of grace in the work of salvation? At this point the creeds and confessions have much to contribute in guiding the expositor to think more deeply theologically and to give a credible, honest answer to the questions raised within a particular text. Most importantly, what does the text reveal about God’s revealing focus and the centrality of Jesus Christ? It is through this developing step that the Reformed preacher can wrestle with the text for its theological importance for life today.

The fifth stage is the formulating of the homiletical idea. Here the preacher must state the exegetical idea in the most exact, memorable sentence possible. It is a statement

that communicates to the listeners the truth of the text in a fresh, vital, contemporary language. Robinson suggests that this can sometimes be done when an exegetical idea is turned into a homiletical idea by making it more up-to-date or personal.<sup>184</sup> He has some general suggestions on how to do this,<sup>185</sup>

- State the idea as simply and as memorably as possible.
- State the idea in concrete and familiar words
- State the idea so that it focuses on response
- State the idea so that the listeners sense communication to them about them.

By stating the homiletical idea the preacher is ready to move to the sixth stage—the purpose of the sermon. Since the writer of Scripture wrote with a purpose to his audience it is important that the homiletical idea lead the preacher in developing the purpose of the sermon. What moral change is the message trying to encourage? What attitudes or behavior should be altered? By identifying this purpose the preacher can begin to make notes on how to possibly conclude the sermon. The conclusion is where the preacher wants the listener to decide to take action in living differently in light of the Word of God.

Once the homiletical idea is formed, the seventh stage is to determine how this idea should be handled to accomplish the purpose of the sermon. Should the idea be stated at the beginning of the sermon and then supported by sub points that follow the idea or should the first point be made only to be followed to a crescendo of delivering the homiletical idea? Sermons can take many forms. The two most direct are deductive where the idea is stated and then supported by the sub points or inductive where the sub points are made leading to the idea. The final form of the sermon has a lot to do with the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 105-6.

purpose of the author in writing the text and the purpose of the sermon in communicating the homiletical idea.

By stage eight the preacher has decided how the idea is to be developed to accomplish the purpose and is ready to outline the sermon. Outlining the sermon is for the benefit of the preacher and will help in the delivery. Once the outline is written, the ninth stage is to fill in the outline.

Robinson points out that the outline is like a skeleton. Stage nine is filling in the outline with supporting materials that explain, prove, apply or amplify the points. There are a number of tools that can be used to make a message live and fill others with that life. It can be done by restating the point or sub points using different words to clarify the meaning. Explaining or defining sets down what must be included or excluded so that the idea is brought into sharper focus. The preacher can use factual information that substantiates the point or a quotation from someone that pulls the supportive agreement of others into the message. There can even be the use of narration or story to help the listener follow the progression of the outline of the sermon.

The final tenth stage is creating the introduction and the conclusion. This is done last because the other nine stages help the preacher identify the concept and apply it for today. Only when that concept is developed can an entrance and an exit sign be displayed. The introduction should, among other things, command the listener's attention, identify a need that they might have so they will want to listen to what is coming, and obviously introduce what the sermon idea is about. The conclusion is the caboose of the train and should tie the loose ends together in such a way that the listener knows what to do next from the sermon idea.

The Presbyterian guidelines for exposition and applying the Scriptures are complemented by Dr. Robinson's methodology of developing and delivering and expository message. The use of the two fulfills a great need in the PCUSA for expositing and applying the Scriptures while being faithful to the confessions. Robinson's methodology strengthens the guidelines and contributes to building a unifying methodology of expository preaching that is faithful to the values and beliefs of the PCUSA. It addresses the concerns that come with how the interpretation of the Scriptures should be done. It is a methodology that welcomes the use of the creeds and confessions of the Church as a guide in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

This methodology does not elevate one theological position (left or right) from within the denomination to a greater status than the other. It simply provides a principled method of faithfully handling the Scriptures so that the Word of God can be more accurately expounded and applied and the teaching of the church can be guided by the confessions. From this combined methodology the denomination can find a unity on how to use the Scriptures and the Confessions in addressing the issues that have created the crisis of what it means to confess that "Jesus is Lord".

The PCUSA's General Assembly has admitted that the denomination has lost its identity in appointing the Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity. Dr. Robinson's methodology of developing and delivering and expository message complements and fulfills the Presbyterian principles of interpretation and application of the Scriptures. Use of such a methodology may once again help the denomination to reclaim the unity which Christ gives to the Church as He is lifted up before the world as "Lord".

## CHAPTER 5

### THREE EXPOSITIONAL SERMONS FOCUSED ON THE MEANING OF “JESUS CHRIST IS LORD”

This final chapter will develop three expositional sermons addressing the idea of Jesus as “Lord” using the expository method of preaching taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson in his book, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages.<sup>186</sup> By specifically focusing on the meaning and identity of Jesus in these sermons, it is the writer’s intent to show how the expository method of preaching can be used: 1) to correctly interpret from Scripture the significance of the confession, “Jesus is Lord” and 2) to effectively restore the PCUSA’s unity by returning to a homiletical foundation of exposition and interpretation that unites its members behind the orthodox teaching of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. The theological conflict eroding the unity of the PCUSA is caused by the differing views of the meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord”. There are different interpretations of what this confession means in its application. The writer will demonstrate how using an exegetical method can bring a clear communication of the meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord” and apply it for the church today. This method begins with the Scriptures and guides the preacher to produce a contemporary message that is faithful to the meaning of the text and the teaching of the Confessions of the Church.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., Robinson.

The first sermon will deal with the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ where He is quoted saying, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”<sup>187</sup>, found in the context of the Gospel of John 14:1-7. The second sermon will deal with the identity of Jesus as He reveals Himself to His disciples by asking “Who do you say I am?”<sup>188</sup>, found in the context of the Gospel of Luke 9:18-22. The third sermon will deal with how the early apostolic teaching explained the substantive purpose of God in the incarnation to the community of faith found in “He is the image of the invisible God...”<sup>189</sup>, found in the context of the Letter to the Colossians 1:15-20. These messages may demonstrate how an exegetical approach to preaching can help the Minister of Word and Sacrament who is serving the local congregation of the Church, to focus more clearly on what the Scripture and the Confessions proclaim concerning the teaching of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The expository method of preaching taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson follows a ten stage process commonly called “Big Idea Preaching”. Robinson warns of the danger of looking for an approach that will give directions to developing a sermon in the manner of following a recipe. Instructions on how to think may get in the way of thinking and thinking about a text of Scripture is a dynamic process. Therefore, “...effective biblical preaching requires insight, imagination, and spiritual sensitivity—none of which comes from merely following directions.”<sup>190</sup> Because of this, the preacher must bring her or his own way of working and an awareness of how others approach the task of sermon development. In light of this, the expositor may sometimes mix the sequence of stages of

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<sup>187</sup> John 14:6 (NIV).

<sup>188</sup> Luke 9:20 (NIV).

<sup>189</sup> Colossians 1:15 (NIV).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, Robinson, 52-53.

the ten stage process. The ten stage process is meant to build a person's confidence in preparing to preach. It can also be used to compare how other preachers conduct their work of preparation for preaching.

Acknowledging this dynamic process of developing an expository method, the writer has included additional information in parenthesis where the use of the Confessions may be used to complement this method in the area of interpretation and application. Below is a list of Robinson's stages of the development of the expository sermon.

1. Choose the passage to be preached.
2. Study your passage and gather your notes.
3. As you study the passage, relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development.
4. Submit your exegetical idea to three developmental questions. (*While using these three developmental questions the expositor may find the Confessions helpful in preparation for communicating the exegetical idea.*)
5. In light of the audience's knowledge and experience, think through your exegetical idea and state it in the most exact, memorable sentence possible.
6. Determine the purpose for this sermon.
7. Thinking about the homiletical idea, ask yourself how this idea should be handled to accomplish your purpose.
8. Having decided how the idea must be developed to accomplish your purpose, outline the sermon.
9. Fill in the outline with supporting materials that explain, prove, apply, or amplify the points. (*The writer suggests that using the Confessions as supporting material to develop the sermon will be helpful in preparation*)
10. Prepare the introduction and the conclusion.

Of the three sermons, the writer will use the first sermon in this chapter to explain the steps of developing and delivering an expository message. The other two sermons will follow that method but with greater brevity of explanation.

## **1<sup>ST</sup> SERMON FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, CHAPTER 14**

### **Stage 1: Choose the passage to be preached.**

Robinson's expository method begins with the rubric "base the sermon on a literary unit of biblical thought."<sup>191</sup> To begin, one must search the passage to identify an author's unit of thought. In the English language, a paragraph marks a unit of thought. Such marking is not used in biblical languages and the paragraphs used in English translations are editorial decisions. Determining the unit of thought may or may not follow that editorial decision.

The chosen passage of focus for the first sermon is John 14:6, "I am the way the truth and the life." This sentence is in a subunit of a larger context that begins with the story of the disciples celebrating Passover with Jesus in John 13:1. Jesus washes the disciples' feet and predicts his betrayal (John 13:18-30) and Peter's denial (John 13:31-38). It is in Chapter 14 that Jesus acknowledges the disciples' troubled spirit over this news of betrayal, denial and death. Chapter 14 begins with Jesus' desire to comfort the disciples. With that movement of comfort, the formation of a sub-unit of thought begins. It opens with the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Beginning with words of comfort, the unit ends with words of assurance. It closes with Jesus informing the disciples that they know God the Father and have seen Him. The context of this sub-unit is followed by a new sub-unit where Philip asks Jesus about seeing God the Father (John 14:8-14)

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 55.



The passage chosen to be preached is John 14:1-7 to focus specifically on the unit of thought that deals with Jesus' personal claim. Jesus' discourse on going to the Father prompts Thomas' question, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"<sup>192</sup> Jesus responds, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>193</sup> Taking the opportunity offered by Thomas' question Jesus' answer is closing a unit of thought that will mark the unit limit of the passage under consideration. The selected unit of thought may now be studied in its context.

14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going."<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

John 14:1-7 NIV

## **Stage 2: Study your passage and gather your notes.**

The expositor must now turn to the unit of thought's context in order to arrive at its meaning. The context of John 14:1-7 is found within the overall purpose of the author's purpose in writing the gospel—that the reader might believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ; "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."<sup>194</sup>

In the last discourse of John's Gospel, after the Lord's Supper and after Judas has gone to betray Jesus, Jesus breaks the news to the disciples that he is going to be leaving

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<sup>192</sup> John 14:5 (NIV).

<sup>193</sup> John 14:6-7 (NIV).

<sup>194</sup> John 20:31 (NIV).

them to be crucified and reveal the glory of God. This revelation causes the disciples to ask Jesus one question, “Where is he going?” Jesus responded that they cannot follow him at this point. For the present they must love one another just as he as loved them so that others will know that they are his disciples. Peter retorts with a pledge to follow Jesus even at the cost of his own life. Jesus then predicts Peter will deny him three times.<sup>195</sup> While these unsettling words trouble the disciples Jesus comforts them by revealing that He is going to His Father’s house to prepare a place for them and they know the way to where He is going. Thomas asks what the way is. It is not a question of destination but of transportation. What is the method by which they can later follow Jesus? How do they get there from here? Jesus responds that He is the way, the truth and the life. In these three terms Jesus goes on to say no one can get to the Father except through him. The “way, truth and life” are key terms in understanding this passage and the identity Jesus is claiming for himself.

The Greek word “*hodos*” can mean literally *way, road, path, street, or highway*. Figuratively it can mean *way of life, type of conduct*. It also speaks of a system of doctrine, specifically a name for Christianity, *the Way* (Acts 24.14), or as a means of entering into something, *way* (Matthew 3.3; 7:13; Hebrews 10:20).<sup>196</sup> In the context of this passage Jesus is not saying He is an example for others to follow but that He is the path to the Father. He is going to God the Father and preparing a place, not for Himself, but for those who will follow through Him to the Father. He states that He is that “way”.

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<sup>195</sup> John 13:31-14:4 (NIV).

<sup>196</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume V, ed. Kittel, Derhard, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, D. Litt., D.D., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 42.

Some would interpret this passage to mean that as the way, Jesus gives an example for us to follow, a way in which we can come to the Father on our own. This does not fit the context. The definite article before these three terms links Jesus as the subject of the three direct objects. It is through Jesus' passion and the cross, that God is glorified and the way is revealed. Jesus' work of going to prepare a place for others speaks of the method that He gives for the disciples to come to the Father (14:2). This means is already revealed to the disciples so that they will know the Father. Without Jesus, there is no way, no path to God. Disciples can get to the destination of the presence of God the Father (14:4) because Jesus is "the way" to God (14:6).

The pattern of Jesus saying "I am..." has been used by John seven times. They are Jesus' descriptions of Himself for the benefit of the disciples and the Gospel's audience (8:12, 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25, here in 14:6 and 15:1, 2). It is no coincidence that John uses all seven cases to emphasize and echo Exodus 3:14 where, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" The designation of "the way" is central and the additional description of "the truth" and "the life" also complements the context of the disciples knowing the way in which they can come to the Father, something they could not do on their own.

The word Greek word "*alathia*" has various meanings in certain contexts: (1) of what has certainty and validity, *truth* (Ephesians 4:21), (2) of the real state of affairs, especially as divinely disclosed *truth* (Romans 1:18), opposite (*fiction, myth*), (3) of the concept of the gospel message as being absolute *truth* (2 Thessalonians 2:12), (4) of true-to-fact statements *truth, fact* (Luke 4:25), (5) of what is characterized by love of truth

*truthfulness, uprightness, fidelity* (1 Corinthians 5:8; 13:6), opposite would be *wrong, evil*; and (6) of reality as opposed to pretense or mere appearance *truth, sincerity* (Philippians 1:18), opposite (*pretext, excuse*); idiomatically literally *in truth*, i.e. *really, truly, indeed* (Matthew 22:16); literally *according to truth*, i.e. *rightly* (Romans 2:2); literally *on truth*, i.e. *really, actually* (Acts 4:27).

The meaning here in John 14 is significantly radical. It speaks of "...the reality of God which is opposed and inaccessible to human existence as it has constituted itself through the fall from God, i.e., through sin, and revelation is a miraculous occurrence beyond the reach of the being which is alien to God. Yet in revelation there is disclosed to man the true possibility of his own being when, in face of the Word of revelation which encounters him, he decides to surrender himself."<sup>197</sup> Jesus' claim is not to be a truth among many truths. He claims to be the reality of God, visibly and personally present before the disciples. Jesus amplifies His meaning of "truth" by saying in verse 7 "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

The word Greek word "*zoe*" can mean: (1) physical *life* (Romans 8:38), opposite (*death*), and (2) supernatural *life*, opposite (*what is subject to dying*) and (*destruction, death*), received by believers as a gift from God (John 3:36; 1 John 5:11), experienced both now (Romans 6:4) and eternally (Mark 10:30); (3) as an attribute of God (1 John 5:20) and Christ (John 5:26b).

Its use in John 14, must be understood in relation to how John's Gospel "...traces the resurrection of Jesus to the fact that as the logos of God and the eternal Son of God he

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<sup>197</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume I, ed. Kittel, Gerhard, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, D. Litt., D.D., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 245.

is life and has life in himself, not merely as the power of his life as a living creature, but as the creative power of God. As a living creature he has a soul and he gives it up to death but his life is not interrupted by death.”<sup>198</sup> As the life, Jesus is the revealer of God. God, who is the giver, the origin of life, is source of all life. By claiming this term for Himself Jesus is to be that source. Jesus does what can be done in no other way and by no other means—He reveals the life giver. Because Jesus is the source of all life He is able to fulfill the divine commission of redemption for humanity by being “the life” and offering Himself, life, to those who are dead to God.

In these terms (“the way, the truth, and the life”) Jesus claims for Himself what is reserved for God. This passage ranks with John 3:16 as an outstanding expression of the Gospel simplicity. “It forms a classical summary of the Johannine doctrine of salvation that is based entirely on Jesus Christ” (Schnackenburg, 3:65).<sup>199</sup> Though the three terms, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, are nouns with a definite article preceding each one the emphasis in meaning clearly falls on the first word “way”. The statement explains Jesus’ assertion of v 4 (“You know the way”), and concludes with a deduction from the main clause: “no one *comes to the Father* except through me.” This is not to lessen the importance of the second and third terms. They explain how it is that Jesus is the Way. He is the Way because Jesus is the truth, i.e., the revelation of God, and because the life of God resides in Him. In the context of John’s Gospel this life includes what is in creation and the life in the new creation (1:4, 12–13; 5:26). Jesus’ claim is to be God incarnate. God has made a way. Jesus’ emphatic claim is amplified in reference

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 870.

<sup>199</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36: John, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1998), 252.

to knowing God the Father. In verse 7b Jesus says, “From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” To know Jesus is to know the living God. To see Jesus is to see the unseen eternal God.

**Stage 3: As you study the passage, relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development.**

The goal of the study of any passage is to find the exegetical idea of the selected text? Writing the exegetical idea is simply a way of putting the unit of thought into a complete sentence. To form this idea the expositor must find the subject and the complement of the text. The question must be asked, “What is the author talking about?” The answer to this question becomes the possible subject of the text. Robinson defines the subject as what the author is saying. Once a possible subject is found the expositor must relate the subject to the details of the passage to see if the passage supports that possible subject. He suggests that all subjects must be sharpened by using a series of definitive questions—Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?

The subject of John 14:1-7 is, “What is the way to God the Father?” Examples of using the definitive questions to help narrow the subject are: Who can the disciples trust? Jesus asks them to trust in Him. What is it that is required to come to the Father? The disciples are to trust in Jesus. Where is Jesus going? Jesus is going to the Father and to prepare a place for the disciples. When will they see Jesus again? They will see Jesus when he returns to receive them. Why does Jesus have to go? Jesus must go in order to prepare a place for them. How can they follow Jesus? They can trust in Jesus’ work of

going. Robinson points out that the subject can always be stated in the form of a question.

Now that the subject is isolated, the complement is found by examining the structure of the passage. How can the disciples know God the Father? They can first look to Jesus. They can know what he has told them. Because they know Him they can know the way to the place He is going. Because they know Him they can know and see the Father. Because they know Him they can know that He is making a place for them and will return to receive them. So the complement is: By trusting Jesus.

The exegetical idea is formed by taking the subject and the complement and combining them into a complete sentence. How can disciples know God the Father? By trusting Jesus is going to the Father. The exegetical idea is: Disciples can know the Father by knowing Jesus.

#### **Stage 4: Submit your exegetical idea to three developmental questions.**

Robinson points out that the preacher has the task of entering three different worlds in the exegetical task of sermon preparation. In the first three stages the expositor enters the world of the Bible with its own culture and idioms of that day. The other two worlds are the modern world, with its own culture and idioms of today and our own particular world, where the local Church lives with its own particular challenges and needs. The following stages are to help the expositor transverse from the world of the Bible to our world today and particularly to whom this sermon is being targeted. An exegetical idea communicates the idea of the biblical world. It is the task of the preacher to "...expound the Scriptures so that the contemporary God confronts us where we

live....”<sup>200</sup> This means that the preacher must study the audience as well as the Bible. What can help the preacher take the exegetical idea from the biblical world into the other worlds? The exegetical idea must be submitted to three developmental questions: What does it mean? Is that true? What difference does it make?

The developmental question, “What does it mean?” deals with both the passage and the people who will hear the sermon. Specifically, what in the passage needs to be explained to the audience? What does Jesus mean when He says “...in my Father's house are many rooms...” or “I am going there to prepare a place for you.” What may be the views that the audience has about heaven or the afterlife? Why do people need to know God the Father? What does a person need in order to be with God? The terms Jesus uses to identify himself (the way, the truth, and the life) are obvious phrases that need to be explained. Jesus’ specific exclusive claim of “...no one comes to the Father except through me” will undoubtedly raise some eyebrows. These must be clearly understood from the passage in order for the audience to understand the big idea.

The second developmental question “Is it true?” centers on validity. The question on anyone’s mind who reads this passage is, “Can I believe that?” Is Jesus the only way to God? What about those who do not hear of the Gospel? What happens to them? Why should Jesus be the only “truth” that is acknowledged? What about truth in other religions? These are some of the deep theological questions that can surface in the minds of the audience.

The third developmental question is, “What difference does it make?” This specifically deals with application of the idea. To properly apply the idea, the expositor must first ask what it meant to those who heard this teaching from Jesus. For the

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, Robinson, 75.



disciples, Jesus' words were meant to comfort their troubled souls. They were troubled because Jesus gave them some predictions that did not fit into their plans for the future. Jesus predicted his death (John 12:20ff), that one of the disciples would betray Him (John 13:18-30), and that Peter would deny Jesus three times (John 13:31-38). What is the biblical author's theological purpose of writing? Though it looked as if Jesus was leaving or being taken away from the disciples the comfort that Jesus was bringing to them was that He was insuring their ability to always be with Him and the Father. In the same way today, believers, by faith, share in the same accomplished work of Jesus on their behalf. The tone of the sermon should follow a comforting tone to those who are troubled by the questions of life and death.

How does a Reformed preacher handle the theological questions that arise from these three developmental questions? This is not just intellectual bantering. An intelligible response is required by the audience. Whatever is preached on this matter must be accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit's illumination and be based upon Scripture's teaching. The response John is seeking from those who read his Gospel is faith in Jesus. It is the writer's assertion that after exhaustive reflection of the passage, the Reformed pastor is aided in preaching on this idea by utilizing the Confessions in addressing these deep theological questions. This does not mean that the expositor should rush to the Confessions without doing the important work of exegesis. Instead, after submitting the expository idea to these three developmental questions within the text, she or he can refer to the Confessions for additional aid in addressing the audience.

As we have seen in covering the nature of the Confessions, they do not usurp or displace the Scriptures but support and express what believers have understood the

Scriptures to teach. Though they are products of their own world, using Robinson's analogy, they still deal with the substantive issues addressed in preaching and teaching the Word of God. As we have seen, a Minister of the Word and Sacrament has taken a vow in this matter. "Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our Confessions?"<sup>201</sup> Robinson's expository method helps the Reformed Preacher to deal with the valid questions on the minds of the listener while addressing the message of the text. The use of the Confessions as an aid helps the preacher to communicate the idea of the text and begin to apply it to the audience. This part of sermon preparation affords the preacher the opportunity to deal with the deep theological waters of the Reformed Faith. The Confessions can assist in addressing the issue of the validity of a biblical message by helping the preacher answer the questions, "What does it mean?" "Is it true?" "So what?" How do the Confessions complement the expositional task in this passage?

In John 14:6, Jesus is addressing the issues of life and death. The broad theological issues being addressed are: Christology, who is Jesus Christ and Soteriology, deliverance or salvation from sin for women and men. Though these are broad branches of Christian theology, the Confessions guide the preacher on what is faithful preaching concerning the whole counsel of Scripture in the matters of life and faith. In dealing with one of the questions raised, "Is Jesus the only way to God?" Our Lord made that emphatic by saying that there is no other way to the Father than through Him. How have believers in the past understood Jesus' teaching? The Confessions contribute the following declarations on this subject (*emphasis mine*):

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<sup>201</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-14.0207d.

For since there **is neither life nor salvation without Christ Jesus**; so shall none have part therein but those whom the Father has given unto his Son Christ Jesus, and those who in time come to him, avow his doctrine, and believe in him.<sup>202</sup>

Why is the Son of God called JESUS, which means SAVIOR? Because he saves us from our sins, and because **salvation is to be sought or found in no other**.<sup>203</sup>

For we teach and believe that this **Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world**, in whom by faith are saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world. For the Lord himself says in the Gospel: “He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber . . . I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:1 and 7). And also in another place in the same Gospel he says: “Abraham saw my day and was glad” (Ch. 8:56). The apostle Peter also says: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” We therefore believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our fathers were (Acts 4:12, 10:43; 15:11).<sup>204</sup>

With these statements from the Confessions, the Minister of the Word can discern a clear theological statement on what it is to call Jesus “Lord.” Even in a pluralist denomination like the Presbyterian Church (USA), a “liberal” or “conservative” Minister of the Word’s exposition of John 14:1-7, if it is to be a faithful exposition, must deal with the “big idea” of what John is saying in this Gospel. Jesus’ claim of deity is emphatic. In order to be faithful to her or his vows, the Minister of the Word must fulfill the office in obedience to Jesus Christ and “...be continually guided by our Confessions.”<sup>205</sup> Scripture’s authority is primary and the Confession’s guidance is secondary. This must not be confused with the inferior idea of second class. “While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed

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<sup>202</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Scots Confession, Chapter XIV, The Kirk, 3.16.

<sup>203</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism, Part II, Of God the Son, Lord’s Day 11, 4.029.

<sup>204</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XI, Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World, 5.077.

<sup>205</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-14.0405b(3).

to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The Church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.”<sup>206</sup> Therefore, the Confessions guide the preacher in his or her study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the Minister of the Word in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the Minister of the Word for her or his work of proclamation.<sup>207</sup>

Some warnings need to be raised as to the use of the Confessions in the sermon. Doctrine in and of itself is dry and lifeless. Using the Confessions as an end will only hinder the exegetical method of developing an expository sermon that is reflective of the teaching of the text. Robinson’s method guides the preacher to remember that the Bible must always be allowed to have supreme authority in interpretation and application. That application is not to parrot a confession but to bring the refreshing Word of God through the sermon to the audience. Therefore, the Confessions’ role in the sermon is to aid in the process of interpretation and application so that the Minister of the Word can take the exegetical idea of the Scriptures and develop the homiletical idea behind the sermon.

**Stage 5: In light of the audience’s knowledge and experience, think through your exegetical idea and state it in the most exact, memorable sentence possible.**

In this step the expositor wants to state the essential meaning of the exegetical idea in a sentence that communicates the idea to the listener. Whatever that sentence is becomes the homiletical idea. Robinson suggests that the homiletical idea should use an up-to-date, contemporary phrase that is less tied to the words of the text. The exegetical

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<sup>206</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Order, G-2.0200.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., G-2.0100b.

idea for John 14:1-7 is “Disciples can know the Father and receive the place Jesus has prepared for them by knowing and trusting in Jesus.” Since the exegetical idea deals with a person getting from one place (this life) to another (the next life) through some mediation, the writer wants to communicate the idea in a way that the audience can identify with. In this case, the category of a means of travel will be employed. Since commercials are catchy 30 second spots to grab attention, the writer will use a play off of a commercial that addressed the frustration of asking directions on how to get somewhere only to find that you are more confused after asking than you were before. That sense of frustration can be used to deal with the issue of how people imagine they can come to God. The homiletical idea is, “You know you can’t get there from here unless you go through him.”

#### **Stage 6: Determine the purpose for this sermon.**

Why is this sermon being preached? What is its purpose? Robinson points out that ...”purpose states what you expect to happen in your hearers as a result of preaching your sermons.”<sup>208</sup> To find this out we must first ask, what is the author’s purpose in writing this passage? What effect did it have on the readers? John included this teaching so that the readers could be comforted with the knowledge that by believing and trusting in Jesus they know God. The listeners should be comforted knowing that trusting Jesus is the way to God and that they can also know the Father and know that they are going to be with God in heaven.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., Robinson, 107.

**Stage 7: Thinking about the homiletical idea, ask yourself how this idea should be handled to accomplish your purpose.**

If the purpose of the sermon is that the listener should be comforted knowing that by trusting that Jesus is the way to God and heaven, what form will the sermon take in order to accomplish the purpose? Deciding the shape or form the sermon will take has a great bearing on its success of arriving at its purpose. Robinson teaches that sermons are developed in three major ways; deductively, semi-inductively, and inductively. “In the deductive arrangement, the idea is stated completely as part of the introduction to the sermon, and then the sermon develops out of that idea. In the inductive development, the introduction leads only to the first point in the sermon, then with strong transitions each new point links to the previous point until the idea of the sermon emerges in the conclusion. Induction and deduction may be combined in a sermon. Your introduction may state only the subject of your sermon, and then each point in the sermon presents a complement to the subject.”<sup>209</sup> There may be variations on what point the idea emerges but once the idea is stated the sermon must proceed deductively to explain or prove or apply the idea.

This particular sermon is built around the need to explain an idea to the audience. Since it must be developed in a way that helps the audience to understand who “the way” is and why they must trust in Him the inductive-deductive development will be used in order to arouse a need in the listener to hear the big idea and then to apply that idea.

**Stage 8: Having decided how the idea must be developed to accomplish your purpose, outline the sermon.**

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., Robinson, 116.

Homiletical Idea: You know you can't get there from here—unless you go through him.

Introduction:

- I. If I can't get there from here I can become troubled. (John 14:1a)
  - 1. I can try to figure out a way.
  - 2. I can try to fix the problem in my own wisdom, strength or intelligence.
  - 3. I have to face the fact I can't get there from here.
- B. I can't get there from here unless I go through Him. (**Idea**)
- II. Jesus tells us to trust in God and Him. (John 14:1b-7)
  - A. Trust involves changing my focusing off of me and on to God. (John 14:1b)
  - B. Trust involves believing in someone else's word and work. (John 14:2-4)
  - C. Trust in Jesus is the only way I can get from there to there. (John 14:6)
    - 1. I can get from here to there because Jesus is the way.
    - 2. I can get from here to there because Jesus is the truth.
    - 3. I can get from here to there because Jesus is the life.
- III. Knowing Jesus gets me from here to there. (John 14:7)
  - A. Knowing Jesus means I know God.
  - B. Knowing Jesus means I have a place prepared for me in heaven.

Conclusion

**Stage 9: Fill in the outline with supporting materials that explain, prove, apply, or amplify the points.**

After the outline is then filled with the supporting materials that will amplify, explain, prove or apply the ideas and make them understandable and appealing to the audience. Robinson points out that supporting material is included in the outline to accomplish the purpose of the sermon.

There are some guidelines in using supporting materials. Restating an idea in different words makes your concepts clearer and can impress an idea on the listener's mind. It is also helpful to define ideas so that limits are established for the listener in order for set boundaries of what must be included and excluded by a statement.

Factual information such as observations, examples, statistics or other data can be used but they must be valid. Using narration from the text to supply background with the

setting or understanding certain customs or actions can bring light in understanding characters in the story.

Quotations are used to impress the listener or to bring in some other authority for the listener to hear. Using a quotation is best when someone has said something in a better way or is in a better position to know the facts or interpret them. Whoever is quoted must be someone who has competent credentials. One source of credentialed material is the Confessions. An audience will be keenly interested in hearing how the Church has sought to explain the Bible and what it teaches. Using the Confessions to support the homiletical idea is a beneficial way of not only supporting the sermon but addressing the theological issues the message may cover. It also guides the preacher in teaching proper doctrine and educating the listener to the witness of Christians throughout the ages who have wrestled with the study of Scripture.

Here are a few guidelines that may help the Minister of the Word in using the Confessions in a sermon as supporting material: 1) Keep your quotes of confessional material to an appropriate length. Appropriate is defined by the level of the audience's experience and use of the Confessions. Since the goal of sermon delivery is for the preacher to be engaged with the listener in order to communicate a biblical truth, resist the temptation to use more of a confessional statement than needed to make the point. 2) Quoting a confessional statement without some historical perspective may fall on the floor before it enters the listener's ear. The "so what?" question may need to be addressed so that the audience understands why the statement is being used. Your listener may not be even aware of what the Confessions are or the reason you are quoting from them. Give enough information so that they can know why the Church confesses



this doctrine today and not just when it was written. 3) Remember that the confessional statements are subordinate standards in the Church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to Him. Merely because the Minister of the Word quotes a Confession does not make it more authoritative than the text being examined. The sermon should reflect the belief taught in the text.

Finally, the use of illustrations is the most problematic supporting material to be used in a sermon. In his book, Biblical Preaching,<sup>210</sup> Robinson spends a large amount of beneficial space explaining the power of illustration and their use. He points out how illustrations make truth believable. They apply the ideas to people's experience, and show your listeners "how to do it." "It takes effort to think of ways a great truth may be applied to life." He goes on to say that illustrations "...aid memory, stir emotion, create need, hold attention, and establish rapport between the speaker and the hearer."<sup>211</sup>

Because illustrations are so important and how they are used makes the sermon contemporary, Robinson teaches that there are five categories of an illustration's effectiveness: 1) The speaker's and the listener's lived experience overlap, 2) The speaker's learned experience overlaps the listener's lived experience, 3) The speaker's lived experience overlaps the listener's learned experience, 4) The speaker's learned experience overlaps the listener's learned experience, and 5) The speaker's lived or learned experience does not overlap the listener's lived or learned experience. Any Minister of the Word who takes the time to review this chapter before finishing the sermon will find it time well invested.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 154.

## **Stage 10: Prepare the introduction and the conclusion.**

An introduction should command the attention of the audience so that they will want to hear the rest of the sermon. Robinson points out that the introduction introduces your audience to the subject of your sermon idea, to your central idea, or in the case of an inductive sermon, to your first major point. It should also uncover needs. This sermon will have the following introduction with the purpose of meeting these characteristics;

Introduction:

During World War II General McArthur asked an engineer how long it would take to build a bridge across a certain river. The engineer responded, “About three days.” He was told to go ahead and draw up the plans. Three days later McArthur asked the engineer for the plans. The engineer seemed surprised and said, “Oh, the bridge is ready. You can cross it now. If you want plans, you’ll have to wait a little longer, we haven’t finished those yet.”

Life can be that way. Planning is not always on the front burner and carefully attended to. Like that bridge builder, it’s easy to plunge into life focusing on “where we hope to be” without much thought of “how are we going to get there.” The final destination is clearer than the means of getting there. Finding the way is a hit and miss exercise in futility. It’s easy to believe that with some hard work and well placed skill anyone can eventually make it. That kind of effort may work for building bridges across rivers but does it work in dealing with the issue of life and death? Does it assure anyone that they will see God?

In a classic statement on conclusion Robinson states that a conclusion should conclude—not merely stop. The conclusion must be shaped in a summary of the message and bring it to a burning focus for the audience. This can be done by summary of the major points of the message. Illustrations, quotations, a question, a prayer, specific directions or visualizations are all tools that the preacher can use to complete the goal of concluding with a burning focus of the message. The following conclusion will follow a summary model in hopes that the audience will be brought back to the purpose of the sermon—comfort from Jesus' words.

#### Conclusion:

Meaning no disrespect to the religious convictions of others, we can proclaim the greatest miracle in human history. No one denies that there was such a man as Jesus, that He lived and that He was put to death by crucifixion. Where...is the miracle I spoke of? Well consider this and let your imagination translate the story into our own time -- possibly to your own home town. A young man whose father is a carpenter grows up working in his father's shop. One day He puts down his tools and walks out of His father's shop. He starts preaching on street corners and in the nearby countryside, walking from place to place, preaching all the while, even though He is not an ordained minister. He does this for three years. Then He is arrested, tried and convicted. There is no court of appeal, so He is executed at age 33 along with two common thieves. Those in charge of His execution roll dice to see who gets His clothing -- the only possessions He has. His family cannot afford a burial place for Him so He is interred in a borrowed tomb. End of story? No, this uneducated, property less young man who...left no written word has, for

2000 years, had a greater effect on the world than all the rulers, kings, emperors, all the conquerors, generals and admirals, all the scholars, scientists and philosophers who have ever lived -- all of them put together. How do we explain that...unless he really was who he said he was?"

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. By trusting in Him you don't ever need to worry about how you're going to get there from here. You never have to blindly hope that one day it will all work out. Jesus has gone ahead of you and completed God's plan that included you from the foundations of the world. The greatest joy of Jesus' plan is that you don't have to wait until you get there to know God. Because Jesus is the way, you can walk with God by faith. Because Jesus is the truth, you can be satisfied within your own soul. Because Jesus is the life, you have been born into a living hope. You can't get there from here unless you go through Him.

**SERMON TITLE: YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE, UNLESS YOU GO THROUGH HIM**

**Scripture: John 14:1-7**

During World War II General McArthur asked an engineer how long it would take to build a bridge across a certain river. The engineer responded, "About three days." He was told to go ahead and draw up the plans. Three days later McArthur asked the engineer for the plans. Surprised, the engineer said, "Oh, the bridge is ready. You can cross it now. If you want plans, you'll have to wait a little longer, we haven't finished those yet."

Life can be that way. Planning is not always on the front burner and carefully attended to. Like that bridge builder, it's easy to plunge into life focusing on "where we hope to be" without much thought of "how are we going to get there." The final destination is clearer than the means of getting there. Finding the way is a hit and miss exercise. It's easy to believe that with some hard work and well placed skill anyone can eventually make it. That kind of effort may work for building bridges across rivers but does it work in dealing with the issue of life and death? Does it assure anyone that they will see God?

An Italian proverb probably says it best; "After the game the king and the pawn go back in the same box". Death is something we all must face—no exercise or diet regimen, no meditation techniques, no amount of money can avoid it. It is the great equalizer.

The Scriptures teach that there are two kinds of death. There's physical death. It is the end of life in this world as we know it. We are all familiar with knowing death awaits us. Our hearts tell us that there must be something more—something beyond physical death! We don't know what it is. That is a result of being spiritual dead. It means deadness to God and to eternal ideas. It explains why we find God so mysterious. We don't know Him in this life and wonder if we can in the next.

The Second Helvetic Confession expresses it in this way. It says that humans have an eternal soul and a mortal body. They have a soul that can never die. Whether in life or in death a person lives forever.<sup>212</sup> Lives forever? Where and with whom? We'd

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<sup>212</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession: Chapter VII-Of the Creation of All Things: Of Angels, the Devil, and Man, 5.034.

like to think it will be in heaven with God, but there is only one problem. Does anyone really have a plan of how I can get there from here?

If these kinds of questions trouble you, you're in good company. In the Gospel of John we are told that the disciples faced the greatest crisis of their lives. Jesus announced that He was going to be leaving them. He was speaking of His coming crucifixion and death. The disciples found it hard to hear. Jesus was supposed to be their King. Their dream of swaggering into Jerusalem leading a coronation parade, ended with the sound of a funeral dirge. The news was as unexpected as a doctor's diagnosis of cancer. In the span of a few words they slipped into the icy plunge of a troubled heart.

No one needs a Ph.D. to know what that feels like. When the rug is pulled out from under your feet there are only so many things you can do. You can try to make sense of what's happened. You could try and muster up courage or figure out a way to fix the problem. What was going to happen was beyond their power to change. And as that dark cloud hung in their hearts, Jesus' encouraged them with these words of comfort. There is a way of knowing how to get to God from here. Jesus puts it this way, "You trust in God, trust also in me."

Trust is an illusive term. We think we know what it means but when pressed to explain it, much less experience it, the words fail to uncover its depth. Trust is a confident expectation of something. It's a reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety of a person or thing.<sup>213</sup> Jesus' words offered hope. Trust Him. In the best sense trust involves a change of focus. It's moving reliance off of me and on to God. It's admitting my inability and God's capability. It's acknowledging my frailty and God's strength. If the truth is told, I can't get there from here on my own. I don't know a way!

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<sup>213</sup> Available on the internet at <<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=trust>> (November 20, 2005).

Jesus does. He says, “You rely on God? Rely on me.” What was Jesus going to do? He was leaving to go and prepare a place in His Father’s house for the disciples.

Like that engineer, many hope they can come to know God by building their own bridge to God. They trust in God, they trust that God exists. They hope they can one day know Him. They know the destination is seeing God, but a plan to make that happen is vague because the chasm that separates women and men from God is not physical, it’s spiritual. How can someone spiritually dead to God get there from here?

Without a specific plan, a way, some might hope that knowing God is only a matter of more education, personal effort or better morals. The gap can be bridged to know God by intellect or a matter of the will to find a way. The way is to simply trust in yourself to get there from here. Work out your plan for knowing God.

Others trust that it will all come together in the end. Eventually everything will work out. Live a good life. Try hard to do the right things. Let nature take its course. The plan is hope in hope; hope that the gap to knowing God will be bridged by enough of the right things. God will miraculously overlook the bad. Everyone knows that God is love. The plan is simply to wing your way into heaven. It’s merely hoping in hope. But Jesus says, “You trust in God, trust also in me.” By trusting in Jesus a person can know the way. How? Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (Verse 6)

Jesus spoke seven times about Himself in this way. “I am the bread of life” (6:35). “I am the light of the world” (8:12). “I am the gate for the sheep” (10:7). “I am the good shepherd” (10:11). “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). “I am the true vine” (15:1). He is repeating the sacred name of God when “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’” (Exodus 3:14). Jesus does not have a plan for the disciples to get to God; Jesus is

the plan. “I am the way of God” means Jesus is the one and only way. What I could not accomplish, God completed. The bridge I could not build because of my spiritual deadness God supplied in Jesus Christ. I can’t get there from here unless I go through Him.

Jesus is the true way—not a way. He is not one of many ways. He is not an example for others to copy. He is not a model to emulate. He is not someone who can be imitated. Jesus is the true way God has made for people to be made alive to God. When Jesus asked the disciples to “...trust also in me” He was inviting them to put the same trust that they had in God in Him. Trust in Jesus as the true way because He is the real and valid personal presence of God among them. God was no longer distant and unknowable mystery. In Jesus, God had bridged the gap caused by sin and revealed Himself to humanity and through that revealing made a way for all who believe to know God. The true and living God was in front of their very eyes.

Jesus is the true living way—not just an invisible God being seen. Jesus is the real earthly demonstration of the invisible God. He is the God who is the giver of life. He is the God who is the origin of life. He is the God who is the source of all life and makes spiritually dead people alive to Him. This spiritual life is a gift through the sin-forgiving, life-transforming power of the cross (John 3:36; 1 John 5:11) and is experienced both now (Romans 6:4) and eternally (Mark 10:30). Jesus is the way the truth and the life because I can’t get there from here unless I go through Him.

In our day, Jesus’ claim is as controversial as it was when He first spoke it. You may have a friend who is Jewish or a coworker who is Muslim. As far as you can tell they are good people with good morals. When you look at them you struggle with Jesus’



claim, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6b) Can they get there from here? How do they bridge the gap? How can they know God?

There is an old saying, “...there is nothing new under the sun.”<sup>214</sup> Jesus lived on earth during one of the most pluralistic periods of human history. There were gods and goddesses worshipped throughout the known world. Jesus’ claim was a scandal in that day as well because many believed that they had to find their own way to God. They thought they could build their own bridge too. This is why the cross of Jesus Christ is called a scandal. It’s a scandal only for those who try to know God by their own efforts. The cross of Jesus Christ is liberating freedom for those who have found forgiveness through the true, living way—Jesus Christ.<sup>215</sup>

Jesus Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This is why our hearts are comforted when we remember that Jesus Christ is the unique, eternal Lord and Savior of the human race.<sup>216</sup> He is called Jesus, meaning Savior, because He saves people from their sins and salvation is to be sought or found in no other.<sup>217</sup> There is neither life nor salvation without Christ Jesus and those who in time come to Him, profess this faith in His work, and believe He is the only one who can get us from here to there, having crossed over from death to life.<sup>218</sup>

Meaning no disrespect to the religious convictions of others, we can proclaim the greatest miracle in human history. No one denies that there was such a man as Jesus, that He lived and that He was put to death by crucifixion. Where...is the miracle I spoke of?

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<sup>214</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9 (ESV).

<sup>215</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:17 (NIV).

<sup>216</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XI, Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World, 5.077.

<sup>217</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism, Part II, Of God the Son, Lord’s Day 11, 4.029.

<sup>218</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Scots Confession, Chapter XIV, The Kirk, 3.16.

Well consider this and let your imagination translate the story into our own time -- possibly to your own home town. A young man whose father is a carpenter grows up working in his father's shop. One day He puts down his tools and walks out of His father's shop. He starts preaching on street corners and in the nearby countryside, walking from place to place, preaching all the while, even though He is not an ordained minister. He does this for three years. Then He is arrested, tried and convicted. There is no court of appeal, so He is executed at age 33 along with two common thieves. Those in charge of His execution roll dice to see who gets His clothing -- the only possessions He has. His family cannot afford a burial place for Him so He is interred in a borrowed tomb. End of story? No, this uneducated, property less young man who...left no written word has, for 2000 years, had a greater effect on the world than all the rulers, kings, emperors, all the conquerors, generals and admirals, all the scholars, scientists and philosophers who have ever lived -- all of them put together. How do we explain that...unless he really was who he said he was?"

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. By trusting in Him you don't ever need to worry about how you're going to get there from here. You never have to blindly hope that one day it will all work out. Jesus has gone ahead of you and completed God's plan that included you from the foundations of the world. The greatest joy of Jesus' plan is that you don't have to wait until you get there to know God. Because Jesus is the way, you can walk with God by faith. Because Jesus is the truth, you can be satisfied within your own soul. Because Jesus is the life, you have been born into a living hope. You can't get there from here unless you go through Him.

## **2<sup>ND</sup> SERMON FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, CHAPTER 9**

### **Stage 1: Choose the passage to be preached.**

The second sermon will deal with the passage recorded in Luke where Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you say I am?”<sup>219</sup> The context of Luke 9:18-22 and its parallel passages (Matthew 16:14 and Mark 8:27-29) are all placed in the closing of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Specifically, Jesus and the disciples have withdrawn to the region of Caesarea Philippi. Though the Gospels record that Jesus would continue to minister in Galilee for a short period of time following his withdrawal, this section is a significant point in his ministry and is followed in each of the Gospel accounts by His traveling south to Judea and particularly to Jerusalem for the Passover.

This unit is specifically placed after Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God and the feeding of the five thousand and it is before the story of the transfiguration. Within Luke 9:18-27 are two sub-units of thought (9:18-22; 9:23-27) connected at the beginning of verse 23 with the conjunction “then”. The first sub-unit deals with the identity of Jesus—who do men say He is? The second sub-unit deals with the cost of following Him as a disciple. The first sub-unit will be the unit of thought selected to be preached. Luke 9:18-22 deals with the identity of Jesus and stands as a complete unit of thought. The following passage is taken from the New International Version:

18 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”<sup>19</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”<sup>20</sup> “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.<sup>22</sup> And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders,

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<sup>219</sup> Luke 9:20 (NIV).

chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Luke 9:18-22 NIV

**Stage 2: Study your passage and gather your notes.**

The audience will need to be made familiar with the characters mentioned in the passage as well as the significance of the individuals suggested by the crowd concerning Jesus’ identity. Though there will undoubtedly be individuals in the audience who will be familiar with these names, a fuller explanation will help in the development of the passage.

Two terms used in this passage need further explanation: “Christ” and “son of man.” The term “Christ” is important in identifying not only who the disciples believed Jesus to be, but also what Luke reveals as Jesus’ role as the “Christ”.

“Christ” is a Greek term that appears 531 times in the New Testament.<sup>220</sup> It is more than a name and originally was a Jewish title. It is used to translate the Hebrew term “messiah” which is used forty-five times in the Septuagint, the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament. “Messiah” means “anointed one” but carries greater significance in the Israelite practice of anointing an individual with oil as a mark of their installment into a special office, such as a king or a priest (e.g., 1 Samuel 9:15-16; 10:1; 16:3, 12-13; Exodus 28:41; 1 Chronicles 19:22).

In the Gospel, Luke uses the term “Christ” twelve times. Twice it is used in infant stories (2:11, 26), once in telling of the ministry of John the Baptist (3:15), once in a confrontation with demons (4:41) and once in our selected passage dealing with Peter’s confession (9:20). The other seven instances are surrounding Jesus’ final days and the

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<sup>220</sup> Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., I. Howard Marshall, consulting ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 106.

passion (20:41; 22:67; 23:2, 35; 24:26, 46). On each occasion Luke consistently uses “Christ” as a title and is therefore portraying Jesus as the Messiah. He also tells us that no one fully understood Jesus’ role in God’s eternal plan before the crucifixion.

In post-exilic Old Testament texts, a hope for a renewed monarchy, like that of David’s, was pictured by the prophets (e.g., Haggai 2:20-23; Zechariah 9:9-10; 12:7-13:1). By the Hellenistic period of Jesus’ day, this hope had included a designation for a future agent to be sent by God who would restore Israel’s national independence and righteousness. There is also some suggestion that there were some variations in ways “messiah” figures were portrayed.<sup>221</sup> The context and the consistent use of Christ as a title suggests that Luke is aware in writing his account of what is meant by the term “Christ”. The disciples, as characters in the story, did not have a full understanding of what that designation meant until after the resurrection. It is after Peter makes his confession that Jesus strictly warns the disciples not to tell anyone who He is and then begins to reveal the role the Christ will take as the “son of man”.

The second term used in the selected passage is “son of man.” It is also a messianic term but speaks of the sphere of Christ’s earthly ministry. This earthly ministry is the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption through the events of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Luke’s use of the term “Son of Man” in verses 22 and 26 is reasonable, assuming that (1) Jesus used it frequently, (2) that He used it especially in connection with His passion, and (3) that the occurrence of the term in the parallel in Matthew 16:14 is not editorial but reflects Jesus’ actual use of it in his initial question to the disciples.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 107.

Verse 22 is particularly important to the unit of thought because it addresses the role of the Christ's work on earth. What Jesus came to accomplish illuminates His identity as the Christ. The work of redemption and the forgiveness of sin through the cross address the question of "Why must he [*the Christ*] be rejected, killed and raised from the dead?" Luke's Gospel reveals that this was in keeping with God's plan of salvation and why believing upon the Christ is the way in which a woman or man can be reconciled to God the Father.

**Stage 3: As you study the passage, relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development.**

What is the author talking about? This story is at a critical point in Luke's Gospel. From this confession forward, the rest of the Gospel moves toward Jerusalem and the cross. Luke is dealing with the identity of Jesus who has performed miracles and preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. The subject is, "Who is Jesus?" The answer or complement is, "He is the anointed one of God." The exegetical idea is formed by combining the subject and the complement. The idea is, "Jesus is the one God set aside for a specific purpose."

**Stage 4: Submit your exegetical idea to three developmental questions.**

Explain it—"What does it mean?" Today the term "Christ" is unfamiliar to many. Some see it as a part of Jesus' name or designation. The full meaning of "Christ" and why Jesus is given that title by Luke's Gospel has to be explained in order for the audience to understand this passage. Particularly the definition given by Jesus as to his

rejection, death and resurrection must be explained in terms of the atonement of sin and the work of salvation which God accomplishes through Christ.

Prove it—"Is it true?" The plan of salvation was called by the Apostle Paul "the mystery of God" (Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-9; Colossians 1:26-27) that is now revealed through Christ's work of the cross. Luke appeals to the work of Christ to determine Jesus' identity, not what others think of Him. The audience can be challenged by that same line of argument. People readily agree with the idea that actions speak louder than words. Overcoming skepticism will be best accomplished by using that type of approach.

Apply it—"What difference does it make?" Luke has written his Gospel so that the reader might believe upon the work of the cross in order to find forgiveness for sin and reconciliation with God. In order for a person to receive this work of grace he or she must come to her or his own confession of Jesus as the Christ. This confession is based on revelation from the living God who gives eternal life to those who repent of the state of sin and believe upon Jesus Christ.

The Confessions may be used to support this exegetical idea. The following quotes deal with the theological issue of the work of atonement (emphasis mine).

That our **Lord Jesus offered himself a voluntary sacrifice** unto his Father for us, that **he suffered contradiction of sinners**, that **he was wounded and plagued for our transgressions**, that he, the clean innocent Lamb of God, was condemned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the judgment seat of our God; that he suffered not only the cruel death of the cross, which was accursed by the sentence of God; but also that **he suffered for a season the wrath of his Father which sinners had deserved**. But yet we avow that he remained the only, well beloved, and blessed Son of his Father even in the midst of his anguish and torment which he suffered in body and soul to make full atonement for the sins of his people. From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin; if any affirm so, **we do not**

**hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's death and the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us.**<sup>222</sup>

Q. 31. Why is he called CHRIST, that is, the ANOINTED ONE?

A. Because he is **ordained by God the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit** to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, fully revealing to us the secret purpose and will of God concerning our redemption; to be our only High Priest, **having redeemed us by the one sacrifice of his body** and ever interceding for us with the Father; and to be our eternal King, governing us by his Word and Spirit, and defending and sustaining us in the redemption he has won for us.<sup>223</sup>

Q. 37. What do you understand by the word “suffered”?

A. That throughout his life on earth, but especially at the end of it, **he bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race, so that by his suffering, as the only expiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and might obtain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.**<sup>224</sup>

DILIGENCE IN THE RENEWAL OF LIFE. But the examples in the Gospel teach us how vigilant and diligent the penitent ought to be in striving for newness of life and in **mortifying the old man and quickening the new**. For the Lord said to the man he healed of palsy: “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you” (John 5:14). Likewise to the adulteress whom he set free he said: “Go, and sin no more” (ch. 8:11). To be sure, by these words he did not mean that any man, as long as he lived in the flesh, could not sin; he simply recommends diligence and a careful devotion, so that we should strive by all means, and beseech God in prayers lest we fall back into sins from which, as it were, we have been resurrected, and lest we be overcome by the flesh, the world and the devil. Zacchaeus the publican, whom the Lord had received back into favor, exclaims in the Gospel: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8). Therefore, in the same way we preach that restitution and compassion, and even almsgiving, are necessary for those who truly repent, and we exhort all men everywhere in the words of the apostle: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought

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<sup>222</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Scots Confession: Chapter IX- Christ's Death, Passion, and Burial.

<sup>223</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism: Part II, Of God the Son, 4.031.

<sup>224</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism: Part II, Of God the Son, 4.037.



from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:12 f.).<sup>225</sup>

ERRORS. Wherefore we condemn all impious utterances of some who wrongly use the preaching of the Gospel and say that it is easy to return to God. Christ has atoned for all sins. Forgiveness of sins is easy. Therefore, what harm is there in sinning? Nor need we be greatly concerned about repentance, etc. Notwithstanding **we always teach that an access to God is open to all sinners, and that he forgives all sinners of all sins except the one sin against the Holy Spirit** (Mark 3:29).<sup>226</sup>

Q. 42. Why was our Mediator called Christ?

A. Our Mediator was called Christ, because **he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure; and so set apart, and fully furnished with all authority and ability, to execute the office of prophet, priest, and king of his Church, in the estate both of his humiliation and exaltation.**<sup>227</sup>

**Stage 5: In light of the audience’s knowledge and experience, think through your exegetical idea and state it in the most exact, memorable sentence possible.**

The exegetical idea is, “Jesus is the one God set aside for a specific purpose.” In order to preach this idea, it must first be rewritten into a homiletical idea that is memorable and contemporary. Phrases for the homiletical idea might be; “God Appointed Jesus for a Reason”.

**Stage 6: Determine the purpose for this sermon.**

The purpose of the sermon is for the listener to personally trust in Jesus as the Christ, not based on what others say, but upon His work of the cross for their own life.

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<sup>225</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession: Chapter XIV-Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man, 5.101.

<sup>226</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession: Chapter XIV-Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man, 5.102.

<sup>227</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Larger Catechism: What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God, 7.152.

**Stage 7: Thinking about the homiletical idea, ask yourself how this idea should be handled to accomplish your purpose.**

The sermon should follow an inductive-deductive form of development where the listener is challenged to ask the question who she or he thinks Jesus is and then hears who Jesus claimed to be through what He came to do.

**Stage 8: Having decided how the idea must be developed to accomplish your purpose, outline the sermon.**

Introduction

- I. Who do you say Jesus is?
  - A. The crowd says he is a prophet
  - B. The disciples are hesitant to say anything
  - C. Peter says that Jesus is “The Christ of God.”
  - D. We know that Jesus is the Christ because of what He came to accomplish (**Idea**)
- II. Jesus is the Christ of God because of what He did.
  - A. Jesus warns them not to tell because of other’s confusion
  - B. Jesus teaches them that as the Christ, He must suffer many things
    - 1. Jesus must suffer rejection
    - 2. Jesus must be killed
    - 3. Jesus must be raised to life

Conclusion

**Stage 9: Fill in the outline with supporting materials that explain, prove, apply, or amplify the points.**

**Stage 10: Prepare the introduction and the conclusion.**

Introduction:

In the last two months, I stumbled upon three different stories that caught my attention.

A man in California claimed that Jesus appeared in His pasta dish. He said the image appeared before his eyes in the form of a bubbling, burned portion of cheese on his dinner.<sup>228</sup>

A month earlier a couple in Ohio claimed that Jesus appeared to them on a pancake. The husband was making flapjacks for his family over the weekend when an image caught his eye. He noticed what appeared to be the face of Jesus. He showed his wife, who agreed with him and believed that it was a sign from above; the couple is now selling the pancake on eBay with an opening bid of \$500.<sup>229</sup>

That same day the Miami New Times reported that Puerto Rican preacher, José Luis De Jesús Miranda, said a wondrous thing happened to him in 1976 when he was living in Massachusetts. He claims that two heavenly beings took him to a marble hall where an apparition merged with his body and began to speak inside of him. De Jesus Miranda believes that he and Jesus Christ became one and the same in that instant.<sup>230</sup>

I don't know how you feel when you hear things like that. It makes me wonder. What do people think about when Jesus is said to show up in unusual places? Don't get me wrong. I don't want to misrepresent or even belittle the faith of others. Nor do I want to bring dishonor to the Lord. When it comes to representing our Lord I want to do it with integrity. I long for our church to do that well too. There are many people in our community who want to know more about Jesus. They are eager for someone to talk with them on their level. That was the concern behind the question Jesus asked his

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<sup>228</sup>News Article <<http://www.local6.com/news/7882549/detail.html>, UPDATED: 1:58 pm EST March 10, 2006> (May 30, 2006).

<sup>229</sup>News Article <<http://www.local6.com/news/6880241/detail.html>, UPDATED: 2:14 pm EST February 9, 2006> (May 30, 2006).

<sup>230</sup>News Article <<http://www.miaminewtimes.com/Issues/2006-02-09/news/feature.html>> (May 30, 2006).

disciples over 2000 years ago—"Who do you say I am?" Could you answer that for others who want to know more?

Conclusion:

To be sure, whatever your response is to God, base it on what Jesus Christ did on the cross for you. Jesus predicted what He would do and then did it. He did it because God appointed Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus, God has open arms for all who sin and chooses to forgive them.<sup>231</sup> When it is all said and done, it doesn't matter what others say about Jesus. That's their judgment. There is only one opinion that makes any difference in your life. Jesus is here before you and asks, "What about you? Who do you say I am?"

## **SERMON TITLE: GOD WAS IN JESUS CHRIST**

### **Scripture: Luke 9:18-22**

In the last two months I stumbled upon three different stories that caught my attention. A man in California claimed that Jesus appeared in His pasta dish. He said the image appeared before his eyes in the form of a bubbling, burned portion of cheese on his dinner.<sup>232</sup>

A month earlier a couple in Ohio claimed that Jesus appeared to them on a pancake. The husband was making flapjacks for his family over the weekend when an image caught his eye. He noticed what appeared to be the face of Jesus. He showed his

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<sup>231</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession: Chapter XIV-Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man, 5.102.

<sup>232</sup> News Article <<http://www.local6.com/news/7882549/detail.html>, UPDATED: 1:58 pm EST March 10, 2006> (May 30, 2006).

wife, who agreed with him and believed that it was a sign from above; the couple is now selling the pancake on eBay with an opening bid of \$500.<sup>233</sup>

That same day the Miami New Times reported that Puerto Rican preacher, José Luis De Jesús Miranda, said a wondrous thing happened to him in 1976 when he was living in Massachusetts. He claims that two heavenly beings took him to a marble hall where an apparition merged with his body and began to speak inside of him. De Jesus Miranda believes that he and Jesus Christ became one and the same in that instant.<sup>234</sup>

I don't know how you feel when you hear things like that. It makes me wonder. What do people think about when Jesus is said to show up in unusual places? Don't get me wrong. I don't want to misrepresent or even belittle the faith of others. Nor do I want to bring dishonor to the Lord. When it comes to representing our Lord, I want to do it with integrity. I long for our church to do that well too. There are many people in our community who want to know more about Jesus. They are eager for someone to talk with them on their level. That was the concern behind the question Jesus asked his disciples over 2000 years ago—"Who do you say I am?" Could you answer that for others who want to know more?

"Who is this Jesus?" That was the question that was buzzing through the grapevine in and around Judea and Galilee. It's still asked today. It could be the very thing Jesus was praying over in the beginning of the passage we read this morning. It was after Jesus was praying that He turned to the disciples and asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" Not surprisingly, Jesus was a household word by that time. Jesus had

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<sup>233</sup> News Article, <<http://www.local6.com/news/6880241/detail.html>, UPDATED: 2:14 pm EST February 9, 2006> (May 30, 2006).

<sup>234</sup> News Article, <<http://www.miaminewtimes.com/Issues/2006-02-09/news/feature.html>> (May 30, 2006).

sent the disciples throughout the region to preach of the coming of the Kingdom of God. That message would have raised expectations from the crowd. Many people had been hoping that God would send a deliverer to free their land from the Roman Empire's oppression of freedom. So when Jesus asked the disciples about the crowd's opinion of Him, He grabbed the disciples' attention.

Some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist. There was only one problem. John the Baptist was dead. His public ministry was suddenly brought to a close, probably about six months after he had baptised Jesus for preaching a sermon that publicly embarrassed Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas jailed and then beheaded John. Luke records that Herod was punishing John for condemning Herod's marriage to Herodias, the former wife of Herod Philip, Herod's own brother (Luke 3:19). Who do people say Jesus is? Some in the crowd thought that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead.

Others in the crowd believed that Jesus was the prophet Elijah. The prophet Malachi (4:5-6) foretold that the prophet Elijah would again appear for the relief and restoration of the country. With this mass preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God some of the crowd believed Jesus was Elijah returned from heaven or some other prophet from of old.

In baseball, the rule for batters is three strikes and you're out. As the crowd went to bat on who Jesus is they missed it—three times. Jesus is the Christ. He is not John the Baptist. He was not Elijah. He was not a prophet from old. Not surprisingly in our day, some say Jesus was a good teacher, a moral man, or a man of God. Popular opinion was never completely accurate then and it's not now. That's why Jesus asks: "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (v. 20). Peter responds, "The Christ of God." To

Peter it was clear as a cloudless day—Jesus was the Christ. For many today, Christ is merely a term associated with Jesus’ last name.

Christ is a title. It is an English that literally means “The Anointed One”. This is why it is used reciprocally, Christ Jesus, meaning “The Anointed One, Jesus”. Originally it was used to translate the Hebrew word “Messiah”. A Christ or Messiah was specifically chosen by God to one day save God’s people. The Jews held hope for someone like this to one day appear. They longed for the good old days when a man named David ruled the land. God had promised that He would reestablish that long lost kingdom—the Kingdom of David by sending descendant of David—a Messiah. As the years passed, the Jews became confused by a variety of ideas concerning the purpose of the Messiah—the anointed one. Even Peter, though he had the right answer to Jesus’ question, did not fully understand all that Jesus was saying about Himself. In the Old Testament God appointed men to carry out His purposes among His people. Those anointed to do so were a prophet, priest or king. The Messiah would come in a more extended role than any one of these. He would fulfill all three. More importantly the Christ would be sent by God to save His people.

God appointed Jesus the Christ, the anointed one. Jesus is the Christ not because of popular opinion, not because of Peter’s confession, not even because a group of people today wish Him to be so. As the chosen one, He came to fulfill the purpose and plan of God. Not plan based on human wisdom, it was God’s wisdom. We call Jesus “Christ” because He was anointed with the Holy Ghost above all measure. He was set apart and given all authority and ability to carry out the task of revealing the Word of God, of serving as the mediator between humanity and God and of ruling over those who He has

created.<sup>235</sup> This God-sized plan needed a God-sized Christ who would come and complete that plan as the Son of Man.

“Son of Man” is also a title used in this passage for Jesus as the Christ. It too is a messianic title from the Old Testament and emphasizes Jesus’ humanity as well as His divinity. By using this term, Jesus refers to the earthly work of dying on the cross for sin and being raised from the dead. Peter did not realize how Jesus would bear in His body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. He did not know that Jesus would have to suffer and give his own life as a sacrifice for our sin.<sup>236</sup> With Peter’s confession, Jesus took the opportunity to tell the disciples what the Christ was anointed to do.

God appointed Jesus to be rejected by His people. Jesus would be humiliated by His own people. They would not recognize Him, His miracles or His coming. This included a kind of suffering Peter and the disciples would have never believed could happen to the Christ.<sup>237</sup> Jesus would willingly hand himself over to suffer the rejection of a close friend—the disciple Judas. Judas would betray Jesus to His enemies. Jesus would willingly hand himself over to suffer the rejection of being abandoned by the other eleven disciples after His arrest. Jesus would willingly hand himself over to suffer the rejection of being scorned by His own people who received Him with cries of “hosannas” and rejected Him with the words “crucify Him.” He would willingly hand himself over to suffer the rejection of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law who, as spiritual

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<sup>235</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Larger Catechism: What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God, 7.152.

<sup>236</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism: Part II, Of God the Son, 4.037.

<sup>237</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Larger Catechism, 7.159.



leaders, should have recognized Him as the Christ and worshipped Him. He willingly suffered all that rejection so that you might be forgiven.

God appointed Jesus to be killed. Jesus was willing to be condemned to a painful death on the cross by Pontus Pilate. He would willingly hand himself over to receive the torment of the Roman Soldiers who were trained in the art of torture. As the Christ, Jesus would willingly hand himself over to personally experience the terrors of death and the powers of darkness and, in doing so, willingly bear the weight of God's wrath reserved for those who had once rejected God. Jesus would willingly hand himself over to lay down his life as an offering for our sin by enduring the painful, shameful, death of the cross. And when Jesus had finished handing Himself over to those who would despise kill Him, God fulfilled His purpose in sending the Christ.

God appointed Jesus to be raised to life by God the Father. It is one thing for a man to suffer for others through rejection and to be killed; it is quite a different matter to claim that He is going to be raised from the dead. Jesus said in verse 22, "...he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." What Jesus was willing to do in suffering and dying is called in our Reformed theology, Christ's humiliation. As the Christ, He willingly obeyed the will of the Father so that God would raise Him from the dead. He did all that for you. He did it so that you could stand before God just as if you had never sinned. He did that so that He might defeat death and its power over you. He did that so He could make you who were once dead to God alive again to Him.<sup>238</sup>

God appointed Jesus the Christ. Therefore, Jesus will come again to judge the world at the last day because God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. This is the first

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<sup>238</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Shorter Catechism, 7.027.

message preached by the Apostle Peter in Jerusalem after the resurrection. “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”<sup>239</sup> Who is this Jesus? Jesus is the Christ. We know that Jesus’ claim is true, not because of someone else’s testimony, but because God appointed Jesus the Christ.

There is a story told that the renowned artist Paul Gustave Dore (1821-1883) lost his passport while traveling in Europe. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to one of the guards. Giving his name to the official, Dore hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass. The guard, however, said that many people attempted to cross the border by claiming to be persons they were not. Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. “All right,” said the official, “we’ll give you a test, and if you pass it we’ll allow you to go through.” Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch several peasants standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was indeed who he claimed to be. His work had confirmed his word!

To be sure, whatever your response is to God, base it on what Jesus Christ did on the cross for you. Jesus predicted what He would do and then did it. He did it because God appointed Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus, God has open arms for all who sin and chooses to forgive them.<sup>240</sup> When it is all said and done, it doesn’t matter what others say about Jesus. That’s their judgment. There is only one opinion that makes any difference in your life. Jesus is here before you and asks, “What about you? Who do you say I am?”

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<sup>239</sup> Acts 2:37 (NIV).

<sup>240</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession: Chapter XIV-Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man, 5.102.

### **3<sup>RD</sup> SERMON FROM COLOSSIANS, CHAPTER 1**

#### **Stage 1: Choose the passage to be preached.**

The Apostle Paul is writing a letter to the Christians in Colosse greeting them as holy and faithful brothers in Christ (1:2). He prays for them with thanksgiving having heard of their faith in God and love for other believers. He is thankful that not only those in Colosse have believed upon Christ but that the Gospel is “bearing fruit and growing” all over the world (1:6). Because of the Gospel’s “fruit bearing” and the Colossians’ faith, Paul prays that they will be filled with the knowledge of God’s will so that they can lead a life worthy of the Lord and please Him by “bearing fruit” in every good work (1:9-10). He hopes their fruit bearing will yield greater strength, endurance, patience and joy as they thank God for rescuing them from their old life and giving them an inheritance, now that they are part of the kingdom of light (1:11-13). God the Father has made possible their qualification to be in His Son’s Kingdom. Paul ends his thoughts about the Colossians, their fruit bearing, their inheritance and turns to the person who is making all this possible—the Son whom God loves and “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:14).

The next unit of thought begins identifying the Son whom God loves (1:15-20). This thought is carried through the passage until verse 21 where Paul’s reminds the Colossians about their former alienation from God before they became inheritors of the kingdom of light.

Paul specifically deals with the person who made this salvation possible for the Christians in Colosse and for those throughout the world who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Together they have received and are bearing fruit because of the

Gospel, thanks to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. From the letter, the problem in Colosse was confusion over the identity and authority of Jesus as Lord. The text selected to be developed into a sermon is Colossians 1:15-20. Its central unit of thought is the person of Jesus Christ;

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:15-20 NIV

## **Stage 2: Study your passage and gather your notes.**

A significant number of New Testament scholars consider that Colossians 1:15–20 is a Christian “hymn” Paul inserted into the letter. The preceding verses (12–14) are said to preserve the style of a confession with its first person plurals (“we” and “us”), while the hymn itself makes no reference to the confessing community (all personal references are absent). Instead it asserts in exalted language the supremacy of Christ in creation and redemption. The words which immediately follow (vv. 21–23) use the language of direct speech to apply themes from the hymn, especially that of reconciliation, to the Colossian community.<sup>241</sup> Colossians 1:15-20 reveals three profound statements concerning Christ. They deal with Jesus’ relation to deity (v. 15a), to creation (vv. 15b-17), and to the Church (v. 18).

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<sup>241</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 44, Ralph P. Martin, New Testament Editor, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998), 62-63.

The first statement deals with Jesus' relation to deity. In reading the Colossian letter the Christians being addressed seem to be challenged by a false teaching that suggests a system of angelic mediators usurping the place and function of Christ and his authority. In the face of this false teaching, Paul found it necessary to clearly communicate Christ's identity and authority. If this is indeed a hymn from the early church, it represents some of the earliest teaching on the identity of Jesus. Paul uses these three themes within the hymn to teach of Christ's supremacy over all.

The meaning of "image of the invisible God" needs to be explained since the audience knows that God is invisible. How can Christ be the image of God? In this passage's context, Paul reveals that Christ always has been, is, and always will be the image of God. The Greek word, "*eikon*", for "image," expresses two ideas. One is "likeness", a thought brought out in some of the English versions. Christ is the image of God in the sense that he is the exact likeness of God, like the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror (cf. Heb. 1:3). The other idea in the word is manifestation. That is, Christ is the image of God in the sense that the nature and being of God are perfectly revealed in him (cf. John 1:18). Therefore, Paul can boldly say that we have "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6) and that believers, reflecting the Lord's glory, "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). There are a number of occasions where Paul uses "*eikon*" regarding this corollary of the increasing transformation of the people of Christ into that same image by the power of the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24), so that at the end nothing remains of the earthly image in those who finally show forth the image

of the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:49; Rom. 8:29).<sup>242</sup> The difference in substance of the “image” is that Christ reveals the nature and being of God, while believers reveal the supernatural life that reflects the character of Christ. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God in the flesh. Paul's statement leaves no place for the vague emanations and shadowy abstractions so prominent in the gnostic system that may have been the problem in Colosse.

The second statement deals with Christ's relation to creation. “Firstborn” is used of Christ, also in Colossians 1:18, Romans 8:29, Hebrews 1:6, and Revelation 1:15. (It is used also in Luke 2:7, but in a different setting.) It may denote either priority in time or supremacy in rank. In Colossians 1:15b perhaps both meanings should be understood. Christ is *before* all creation in time; he is also *over* it in rank and dignity. The major stress of Paul's point seems to be on the idea of supremacy. Jesus was not created but the one through whom all things are created.

Some see in the word an allusion to the ancient custom whereby the firstborn in a family was accorded rights and privileges not shared by the other offspring. He was his father's representative and heir, and to him the management of the household was committed. Following this line of interpretation, the passage teaches that Christ is his Father's representative and heir and has the management of all creation committed to Him. Jesus is the Lord and God over all creation. This includes all thrones, powers, or rulers or authorities in any setting within creation, whether they are visible or invisible.

All things came to be “in [NIV, by] him” (v. 16a), “through [NIV, by] him” (v. 16b) and “for him” (v. 16c). Creation was “in [*en*] him” in the sense that it occurred within the sphere of his person and power. He was its originating cause and the center of

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

its spiritual locality. Creation is through Christ in the sense that he was the mediating agent through whom it actually came into being. The preposition is frequently used of Christ's redemptive mediation between God and men (cf. Eph. 2:18; 1 Thess. 5:9, et al.), but the thought here is that the entire life of the universe is mediated from God through Christ (cf. John 1:3, 10).

Creation is for Christ in the sense that He is the end for which all things exist, the goal toward whom all things were intended to move. All things are meant to serve His will and to contribute to His glory as His blissful servants. Verse 16 states the essential reason for Christ's lordship over creation; He is its creator. Verse 17 summarizes and completes the statement of Christ's relation to creation: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Christ is before all things in time. The statement is general enough to include also the notion that He is above all in rank. The thought is similar to that of the earlier expression, "firstborn over all creation" (v. 15b). All things "hold together" in Christ means that he is both the unifying and personal sustainer of all creation.

Paul's third affirmation relates to the new creation or Church: "And he is the head of the body, the church" (v. 18a; cf. 2:19; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15). To be the "head" of the Church is to be the Church's sovereign Lord. Christ is the source of the Church's life. Christ, as Head of the Church, as its' Chief, as its Leader, guides and governs His people. The "He" in this verse is emphatic. Christ alone—Christ and no other—is Head of the Church. Christ's headship over the Church is evident from the resurrection. "He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead." In Greek, the first word in verse 18b

is a relative pronoun (*hos*) for emphasis. It is almost equivalent to “because he is”. Because Jesus is the first born from among the dead, He is the head.

The word “beginning” may be interpreted in any one of three ways: as referring to (1) supremacy in rank, (2) precedence in time, or (3) creative initiative. The best sense seems to be the idea of creative initiative. Christ is the origin and the source of the life of the Church (cf. NEB). “Firstborn” (*prototokos*), which in the Greek text is in apposition with “beginning,” defines more precisely what Paul means. This term was used earlier (v. 15) to point up Christ's relation to creation. Paul was using it in the sense of precedence in time and supremacy in rank. Here in verse 18, the idea of precedence is the more prominent meaning. Christ was the first to come from the dead in true resurrection life (i.e., never to die again, cf. 1 Cor. 15:20). Because Jesus was the first to be born from the dead, He possesses the new and higher life that His people share by being united with Him. The firstborn from the dead is what establishes his place as the beginning and the origin of the Church's life. Because Christ was the first to be born from the dead, he has the dignity and sovereignty belonging to the “firstborn”.

In the last part of verse 18, Paul writes “...so that in everything he might have the supremacy”. This is a summary of all that Paul has affirmed from verse 15. Syntactically it expresses the purpose of Christ's being the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. He rose from the dead in order that His preeminence might become universal, extending both to the old creation and to the new creation available through Him. Jesus Christ had always been first, but by His resurrection He entered upon an even wider and more significant sovereignty (cf. Acts 2:26; Rom 1:4). Jesus is declared to be both Lord



and Christ. These titles express that Jesus is God incarnate and now exalted to a position of supremacy through the work of the cross.

**Stage 3: As you study the passage, relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development.**

What is Paul talking about? The subject of the unit of thought is: Who is this Jesus? What does Paul say about the identity of Jesus? What is the complement to the subject? He is the image of invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Church and the reconciler of all things. The exegetical idea formed from this subject and complement is: Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Head of the Church and the reconciler of all things.

**Stage 4: Submit your exegetical idea to three developmental questions.**

Explain it—"What does it mean?" The reason Paul wrote this letter was to address a heresy that challenged the identity and authority of Jesus Christ. This challenge was an opportunity to explain the identity of Jesus Christ. This heresy was a syncretistic movement combining at least three separate elements.

First, the insistence on legalism, ritualism, and the observance of holy days points to a Jewish element that required some additional requirement of the believer to find forgiveness and peace with God.

Secondly, the system's "philosophical" character, angelolatry, and perhaps ascetic tendencies point to a pagan element that taught of the inferiority of Jesus to God in His holiness and position of authority. Probably an incipient form of what later became

known as Gnosticism; it was characterized by belief in the evil of matter, in mediating beings, and in salvation through knowledge. Gnostics argued that since God and matter were therefore antagonistic, God did not create this world and has absolutely no contact with it. Instead, God put forth from himself a series of “aeons” or emanations, each a little more distant from him and each having a little less of deity. At the end of this chain of intermediate beings there is an emanation (i.e., Jesus Christ) possessing enough of deity to make a world but removed far enough from God that his creative activities could not compromise the perfect purity of God.

Thirdly, there was a Christian element in the Colossian heresy. While at its heart it was a combination of Judaism and paganism, it wore the mask of Christianity. It did not *deny* Jesus Christ, but it did dethrone him. It gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place over all things. This Christian facade made the Colossian heresy all the more dangerous.

Prove it—”Is it true?” The way Paul deals with his audience as to the validity of this statement is by reminding them of the “fruit” they have experienced through their faith in the Gospel. This fruit did not come from a lesser “emanation” but from the only one who delivered them from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13-14) by his work of redemption and forgiveness. After offering himself as a personal example of someone who has produced “fruit” that is in keeping with the faith, he then challenges them by saying, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:6-7) This thankfulness is in response to the completed work of salvation that Jesus did through the cross. Similarly, the validity in preaching on the

identity of Jesus Christ to an audience today can be supported by addressing how salvation has come to humanity.

Apply it—"What difference does it make?" A believer can find reassurance of salvation by understanding the identity of the one who made this salvation possible. How is it that anyone can claim or contend that they have peace with God unless they know the identity of the one who made such peace possible? His credentials are the very foundation for all hope and faith.

The following excerpts from the Confessions can be used to aid in this development of the idea of the supremacy of Jesus as the image of God, Lord of creation and head of the Church. (emphasis mine).

We confess and acknowledge **one God alone**, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust. **Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by his inscrutable providence for such end as his eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of his own glory.**<sup>243</sup>

We believe...

And in **one Lord Jesus Christ**, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, **God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God**, begotten, not made, **being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made**; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Scots Confession, Chapter 1-God, 3.01.

<sup>244</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Nicene Creed, 1.2.

Q. 26. What do you believe when you say: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”?

A. **That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth with all that is in them, who also upholds and governs them by his eternal counsel and providence, is for the sake of Christ his Son my God and my Father.** I trust in him so completely that I have no doubt that he will provide me with all things necessary for body and soul. Moreover, whatever evil he sends upon me in this troubled life he will turn to my good, for he is able to do it, being almighty God, and is determined to do it, being a faithful Father.<sup>245</sup>

Q. 33. Why is he called GOD'S ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, since we also are God's children?

A. Because **Christ alone is God's own eternal Son**, whereas we are accepted for his sake as children of God by grace.<sup>246</sup>

GOD IS THREE. Notwithstanding we believe and teach that the same immense, one and **indivisible God is in person inseparably and without confusion distinguished as Father, Son and Holy Spirit** so, as the Father has begotten the Son from eternity, the Son is begotten by an ineffable generation, and the Holy Spirit truly proceeds from them both, and the same from eternity and is to be worshipped with both.<sup>247</sup>

CHRIST IS TRUE GOD. We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world. And we believe that he was born, not only when he assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but **by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner.** For Isaiah said: “Who can tell his generation?” (Ch. 53:8). And Micah says: “His origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2). And John said in the Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” etc. (Ch. 1:1). Therefore, **with respect to his divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God** (Phil. 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but **in substance and nature**, as the apostle John has often said: “This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Paul also says: “He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding all things by his word of power” (Heb. 1:2 f.). For in the Gospel the Lord himself said: “Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made” (John 17:5). And in

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<sup>245</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism, 4.026.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 4.033.

<sup>247</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter III-Of God, His Unity and Trinity, 5.016.

another place in the Gospel it is written: “The Jews sought all the more to kill him because he . . . called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).”<sup>248</sup>

Q. 50. “Why is there added: ‘And sits at the right hand of God’?”

A. “Because Christ ascended into heaven so that he might manifest himself there as **the Head of his Church**, through whom the Father governs all things.”<sup>249</sup>

**CHRIST THE SOLE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. It is the head which has the preeminence in the body, and from it the whole body receives life; by its spirit the body is governed in all things; from it, also, the body receives increase, that it may grow up.** Also, there is one head of the body, and it is suited to the body. Therefore **the Church cannot have any other head besides Christ.** For as the Church is a spiritual body, so it must also have a spiritual head in harmony with itself. Neither can it be governed by any other spirit than by the Spirit of Christ. Wherefore Paul says: “He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Col. 1:18).<sup>250</sup>

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.<sup>251</sup>

2. **After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female,** with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.<sup>252</sup>

1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the prophet, priest, and king; **the head and Savior of his Church, the heir of all things, and judge**

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<sup>248</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XI-Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World, 5.062.

<sup>249</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Heidelberg Catechism, Part II-Of God the Son, 4.050.

<sup>250</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XVII-Of The Catholic and Holy Church of God, and of The One Only Head of The Church, 5.131.

<sup>251</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter IV-Of Creation, 6.022.

<sup>252</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter IV-Of Creation, 6.023.

**of the world;** unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.<sup>253</sup>

1. The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, **under Christ the head** thereof, and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.<sup>254</sup>

6. The **Lord Jesus is the only head of the Church**, and the claim of any man to be the vicar of Christ and the head of the Church, is without warrant in fact or in Scripture, even anti-Christian, a usurpation dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>255</sup>

1. All saints being united to **Jesus Christ their head**, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as to conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.<sup>256</sup>

Q. 52. How was Christ exalted in his resurrection?

A. Christ was exalted in his resurrection, in that, not having seen corruption in death (of which it was not possible for him to be held), and having the very same body in which he suffered, with the essential properties thereof (but without mortality and other common infirmities belonging to this life), really united to his soul, he rose again from the dead the third day by his own power; whereby he declared himself to be the Son of God, to have satisfied divine justice, to have vanquished death and him that had the power of it, and to be Lord of quick and dead. All which he did as a public person, **the head of his Church**, for their justification, quickening in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day.<sup>257</sup>

Q. 53. How was Christ exalted in his ascension?

A. **Christ was exalted in his ascension**, in that having, after his resurrection, often appeared unto, and conversed with his apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations; forty days after his resurrection, he, in our nature, and as our head, triumphing over enemies, visibly went up into the highest heavens, there to receive gifts for men, to raise up our affections thither, and to prepare a place

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<sup>253</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VII-Of Christ the Mediator, 6.043.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 6.140.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 6.145.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 6.146.

<sup>257</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Larger Catechism, What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God, 7.162.

for us, where himself is, and shall continue till his second coming at the end of the world.<sup>258</sup>

Q. 64. What is the invisible Church?

A. The invisible Church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under **Christ the head**.<sup>259</sup>

The risen **Christ is the savior for all men**. Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as his reconciling community. **Christ is head of this community, the church**, which began with the apostles and continues through all generations.<sup>260</sup>

**Stage 5: In light of the audience's knowledge and experience, think through your exegetical idea and state it in the most exact, memorable sentence possible.**

The exegetical idea must now be put into a contemporary idea. "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation the Head of the Church and the reconciler of all things." Since Paul is revealing the identity of the one who made salvation possible for all women and men the homiletical idea for this sermon is: "Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross."

**Stage 6: Determine the purpose for this sermon.**

The purpose of this sermon is for the listener to appreciate the work of God's salvation by knowing who it is that made it all possible. Paul wanted the Colossians to know the identity of Jesus in the midst of a sea of false appellations.

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<sup>258</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Larger Catechism, What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God, 7.163.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 7.164.

<sup>260</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967, The Confession Part I-God's Work of Reconciliation, 9.10.

**Stage 7: Thinking about the homiletical idea, ask yourself how this idea should be handled to accomplish your purpose.**

Since the passage flows in a deductive style with Paul explaining the identity of Jesus Christ in four points the sermon structure will follow a deductive development with the homiletical idea mentioned in the introduction and the points of the sermon explaining and developing the big idea of the identity of Jesus.

**Stage 8: Having decided how the idea must be developed to accomplish your purpose, outline the sermon.**

Sermon Outline:

Introduction (Big Idea)

- I. Jesus is the “image of the invisible God”
  - A. God is invisible because He is a Spirit
  - B. Jesus is the manifestation of God
- II. Jesus is the creator of all creation
  - A. He is the first born of all creation
  - B. He is the creator of all things
  - C. He holds all things together
- III. Jesus is the head of the Church
  - A. He is the creator of the Church
  - B. He is the firstborn from among the dead
- IV. Jesus is reconciler of all things
  - A. He is the sum total of God’s purpose to be known by His creation
  - B. He is the agent of reconciliation

Conclusion

**Stage 9: Fill in the outline with supporting materials that explain, prove, apply, or amplify the points.**

**Stage 10: Prepare the introduction and the conclusion.**



## Introduction:

When we first moved to Iredell County in North Carolina there was a restaurant known for its incredibly delicious roasted chicken. Some of you have known the delight of sitting down at a table and anticipating the delight of a meal from that little kitchen. Port-a-Pit was a local “mom and pop” restaurant without the mom—she had died years before the restaurant opened. The pop was an elderly gentleman whose culinary success could be attributed to one carefully guarded secret—his marinade recipe. No one, not even his daughters, knew the secret behind that mouth watering taste of moist tender meat. Business flourished and people came from distant towns and cities to enjoy a most satisfying meal. Unexpectedly to all who knew and loved him, the man died—and so did his recipe.

His daughters tried to carry on the tradition their father had started. They experimented and tested with all types of elixirs to reproduce that one-of-a-kind marinade. To their credit they probably did a good job or at least came as close as anyone could. The chicken was just as moist and tender. The kitchen was always filled with that same unmistakable aroma. Those determined women even fixed up the place, gave it a touch of paint, and donned some new table cloths. They added the kind of touch only a woman can give to what was basically a glorified chicken coup, but that kind of touch didn’t matter. The magic was gone. Something was missing. It wasn’t so much the menu as the person from behind the counter.

I believe that something similar can be true for the cross of Jesus Christ. It can become just a symbol. Symbolism can replace substance. If we are not careful, the cross can become an ornament to adorn, without a thought to the person who hung upon it.

The cross, of course, is a reminder of Jesus Christ. He is its focus, its power. Jesus is the only one who can bring peace with God, who can offer forgiveness for sin and who can reveal the God we cannot see or touch. Without Christ, the cross is empty. Without Christ, we are still in our sins and estranged from God. Without Christ, faith in a cross is simply foolishness. But faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

Conclusion:

To some, the cross is a simple symbol for adornment. For those who are being saved, it is a reminder of the One who brought power to the symbol of shame and condemnation. As the image of the invisible God, Jesus allows us to gaze upon God's beauty and glory. As the creator of all things, Jesus has created us to love God. As the Head of the Church, Jesus has called us to be his earthly representatives on earth and in heaven. As the reconciler Jesus has made sinners acceptable to a holy pure God. Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross and turned a symbol into the power and glory of God.

**SERMON TITLE: A REASONABLE FAITH**

**Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20**

When we first moved to Iredell County in North Carolina there was a restaurant known for its incredibly delicious roasted chicken. Some of you have known the delight of sitting down at a table and anticipating the delight of a meal from that little kitchen. Port-a-Pit was a local “mom and pop” restaurant without the mom—she had died years

before the restaurant opened. The pop was an elderly gentleman whose culinary success could be attributed to one carefully guarded secret—his marinade recipe. No one, not even his daughters, knew the secret behind that mouth watering taste of the moist tender meat. Business flourished and people came from distant towns and cities to enjoy a most satisfying meal. Unexpectedly to all who knew and loved him, the man died—and so did his recipe.

His daughters tried to carry on the tradition their father had started. They experimented and tested with all types of elixirs to reproduce that one-of-a-kind marinade. To their credit they probably did a good job or at least came as close as anyone could. The chicken was just as moist and tender. The kitchen was always filled with that same unmistakable aroma. Those determined women even fixed up the place, gave it a touch of paint, and donned some new table cloths. They added the kind of touch only a woman can give to what was basically a glorified chicken coup, but that kind of touch didn't matter. The magic was gone. Something was missing. It wasn't so much the menu as the person from behind the counter.

I believe that something similar can be true for the cross of Jesus Christ. It can become just a symbol. Symbolism can replace substance. If we are not careful, the cross can become an ornament to adorn, without a thought to the person who hung upon it. The cross, of course, is a reminder of Jesus Christ. He is its focus, its power. Jesus is the only one who can bring peace with God, who can offer forgiveness for sin and who can reveal the God we cannot see or touch. Without Christ, the cross is empty. Without Christ, we are still in our sins and estranged from God. Without Christ, faith in a cross is

simply foolishness. But faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

There was a group of people who lived a city called Colosse. They had emptied the cross of its power, forgetting the teaching they first received. When Paul prayed for the Colossians, he thanked God for them. They had believed in Jesus Christ and experienced His fruitfulness in their lives. They had faith in Christ Jesus and loved fellow believers. A man named Epaphras delivered the bad news. The Colossians had fallen into a heretical teaching that threatened to empty the cross of Christ. No one knows what the teaching was exactly. From Paul's letter we can tell that it challenged Jesus' being God in the flesh—God incarnate. The Gospel proclaims that Jesus is coequal with God.<sup>261</sup> It reveals that Jesus is both true man and true God in one person. The Colossians had heard and believed this, but now had lost sight of Jesus' divinity. They thought that God had to send someone else to rescue them from the darkness of sin since God could not be near anything sinful. It was Jesus as an agent of God who brought them into the kingdom of God. If this false teaching was left unchecked, their faith would no longer be reasonable. But faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

Paul responds with four descriptions for us to consider why our faith is so rational. Jesus is the “image of the invisible God”. How do you describe someone who is invisible? Paul says look at Jesus. Jesus is God in the flesh. For God to be God He must have certain qualities or characteristics that separate Him from what He created. God is one in essence or nature. He is not dependent on others for life. He is the source of all

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<sup>261</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XI-Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World, 5.062.

life. God is invisible to our eye and does not grow old with time. He is greater than all our imagination and is eternal. He is creator of all things visible and invisible. He is all knowing, wise, kind, merciful, just and true.<sup>262</sup> God is spirit and is mysterious to us until we begin to look to Jesus.

There is a Bible school song that helps children think about this unseen God. Its lyrics are simple and helpful;

God is a Spirit  
Just think of the wind  
He doesn't have a body like men  
Oh no!  
He doesn't have a body like men  
Just think of the wind  
Blowing here blowing there  
He doesn't have a body like men

Imagine the wind. What does wind look like? It can't be pictured. Only its effects can be felt. The same is true for God. We are forbidden to make an image to represent Him on earth.<sup>263</sup> This command spares us from vain worship where we imagine God from our own limited sinful imaginations. The God we must worship must be revealed if we are going to worship in spirit and in truth. Paul says Jesus is that revelation.

Jesus is God's image revealed to us. He is God's likeness. Christ is the image of God in the sense that he is the exact likeness of God, like the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror (cf. Heb. 1:3). He is God's manifestation. Christ is the image of God in the sense that God's nature and being are perfectly revealed in Jesus. Since Jesus is the image of the invisible God, isn't it reasonable to believe that through Christ we can

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 5.015.

<sup>263</sup> Exodus 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." (NIV).

come to understand and know this one true God? Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

Secondly, Jesus is the creator of all creation. This is what Paul is saying when he declares that Jesus was the firstborn of all creation. Jesus has priority in time or supremacy in rank over everything. Christ is before all creation in time. He eternally existed before anything was created. He was not created. He was the creator. Therefore, Jesus is superior to all that He created both things that are visible and invisible.<sup>264</sup>

The false teaching in Colosse emphasized that God was too pure to touch creation since the creation was considered evil. God created angels or celestial beings who, in turn, created “lesser” beings. Jesus was the last celestial being created. How silly. He, who was created, created the world? Jesus was not created but the one through whom all things are created. All that we see and know was created through Jesus; He also holds all things together as its creator. Jesus alone has all authority and power over the universe. Knowing that Jesus is the creator of all this other teaching was simply foolishness to Paul. Since it is this God who created all things, can He not also create a way for us to have forgiveness for our sins by dying on the cross for us? Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

Thirdly, Paul reveals that Jesus is the Head of the Church. Christ alone—Christ and no other—is Head of the Church. The Confessions teach that Christ is the sole Head of the Church. This means that the Lord Jesus is the only head of the Church.<sup>265</sup> He is the one who leads His people. It is the head which has the preeminence in the body. It is

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 5.015.

<sup>265</sup> The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXVII/Chapter XXV-Of the Church, 6.145.

the head that give direction to the whole body.<sup>266</sup> To be the “head” of the Church is to be the Church’s sovereign Lord. Christ is its Chief, and as its Leader, guides and governs His people.

Because Jesus is the Head, He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. Christ is the origin and the source of the life of the Church. He was the first one to rise from the grave. Because He is raised, we too will rise again and stand before Him giving Him the devotion and love Jesus deserves as the Head of the Church. Christ was the first to come from the dead in true resurrection life (i.e., not to die again, cf. 1 Cor. 15:20). Because Jesus was the first to be born from the dead, He possesses the new and higher life that we share by being united with Him. That new life is available to those who believe upon Him. Since Jesus is the Head of the Church, is it reasonable to believe that we will share in this resurrection life through His work of the cross? Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable only when you consider that He was the one who would become the head of the Church, the first to be born from the dead, who hung upon it.

Finally Paul declares that Jesus is the reconciler of all things. A reconciler is someone who makes two enemies friends again. It is someone who can make acceptable what was unacceptable. This is what Jesus accomplished through the cross. He took upon His body the penalty for our sins and paid them with His death. By being raised from the dead, Jesus offers life to those who were once dead to God. He was able to make this offer because God was pleased to have His fullness dwell in Jesus. God, in all that God, is was in Jesus. The Phillips translation renders it “the full nature of God”; the New English Bible, “the complete being of God.” Therefore, because nothing was lacking in Christ’s deity, Jesus is the one who is able to unite us with the one true God.

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 5.131.

Since Jesus is the reconciler of all things, is it reasonable to believe that through Christ's work of the cross we can be restored to the God who created us to love Him? Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross.

To some, the cross is a simple symbol for adornment. For those who are being saved, it is a reminder of the One who brought power to the symbol of shame and condemnation. As the image of the invisible God, Jesus allows us to gaze upon God's beauty and glory. As the creator of all things, Jesus has created us to love God. As the Head of the Church, Jesus has called us to be his earthly representatives on earth and in heaven. As the reconciler, Jesus has made sinners acceptable to a holy pure God. Faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable when you consider who hung upon the cross and turned a symbol into the power and glory of God.

## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to develop three sermons from three biblical texts to address the meaning of "Jesus is Lord". Using the expository method of preaching taught by Dr. Haddon Robinson,<sup>267</sup> the writer hoped to demonstrate how this expository method can be used to correctly interpret the Scriptures. In doing so, the significance of the Christian Church's confession, "Jesus is Lord", is clearly developed and proclaimed. By demonstrating in three passages of Scripture this expository method and seeking the aid of The Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in interpreting and applying these texts, the writer suggests that the PCUSA can regain its unity as a denomination using Robinson's method of Big Idea Preaching. The theological conflict eroding the unity of the PCUSA is caused by differing views of the meaning of the

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., Robinson.



confession “Jesus is Lord”. Using this exegetical method, a preacher can clearly communicate the meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord” from the Scripture to a contemporary audience while being faithful to the meaning of the text and the teaching of the Confessions of the church. Returning to a homiletical foundation of exposition can enable ordained leaders (i.e., Ministers of the Word, Elders and Deacons) to pass on to the active members the orthodox teaching of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

As demonstrated in the first sermon, the early church proclaimed “Jesus is Lord” because of Christ’s claim to be the way, the truth and the life. By trusting in Him, individuals can know God the Father and also know that God has prepared a place in heaven for all those who believe upon the Son. When Jesus declares that He is the way, the truth, and the life, He proclaims Lordship over salvation. There is no other “way” other than through faith in Jesus’ sacrificial work of atonement for sin which He accomplished on the cross. The Confessions of the PCUSA support and explain this truth in a way that is clear and consistent. Salvation is in Jesus Christ and in no other else. Therefore the PCUSA has an opportunity to not be ashamed of the Gospel and the scandal of the cross, but to faithfully proclaim its truth and seek to ordain leaders who understand and believe that this salvation, as a work of God, is to be shared and taught to all who wish to be saved.

The second sermon demonstrated what it means for the Christian Church to call Jesus the “Christ”. He is anointed, chosen by God, to come into the world to suffer many things and to be killed. This suffering and death was part of God’s plan and the Son of Man’s work of obedience, as the anointed one—the Christ fulfilled and completed the

plan of redemption. God has declared Jesus both Lord and Christ. The Confessions of the PCUSA clearly teach and explain this act of atonement and that God has brought the opportunity of salvation to all women and men through the work of the cross accomplished by Jesus the Christ. Therefore, the PCUSA will regain its unity by ordaining and training its leaders who will live up to their ordination vows and take the Confessions' guidance seriously while discipling the active members of local churches.

The third sermon demonstrated the scriptural teaching of the identity of Jesus Christ. As the image of God who was fully God and fully man, Jesus reveals the manifestation of the qualities and character of God in visible form. Therefore, women and men can only look to Jesus, witnessed to by the Scriptures through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, to see, understand and know the invisible God. He is the Lord of all creation and Lord of the Church. All things are to be submitted to Him and abide under His rule and authority. Eventually all things will be subject to Him because Jesus is the reconciler. He has come to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin in order that He might offer forgiveness and life to those who repent of sin and believe upon His work of the cross. Therefore, the PCUSA has an opportunity to regain its unity by focusing on the person of Christ and the work He has accomplished. While seeking social justice, attending to the needs of the oppressed and poor, these works on behalf of Christ must never usurp or overshadow the task of proclaiming the identity of the One who died on the cross and rose from the grave. With all respect to those of other faiths and religions, Jesus' uniqueness and identity must never be compromised or minimized in dialogues designed to bring mutual respect and understanding. The denomination has an

opportunity to witness to the truth that God was fully, completely in Jesus Christ and through Him, reconciling the world to God.

The PCUSA states that the denomination believes that Christ gives to his Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. Therefore, Christ's will is to be obeyed as it is set forth in Scripture.<sup>268</sup> The PCUSA also believes that the unity of the Church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression of that unity in the denomination's faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it.<sup>269</sup> There can be no mistake in believing that the PCUSA can only find unity again by rediscovering what the Scriptures teach and the meaning in confessing "Jesus is Lord". That teaching and meaning must be scripturally based and supported by the teachings of the Confessions. As demonstrated in the sermons in this chapter Jesus makes exclusive and unique claims about Himself and God's Kingdom. Robinson's method of expository preaching is one aid that can guide our leaders back to clearly expositing the Scriptures and communicating their truth to a new generation thirsty for the revealed truth of the Gospel.

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<sup>268</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-1.0100c.

<sup>269</sup> The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order, G-4.0201.

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